

**A Woman's Work: Exploring Gender Roles and Agriculture in Charikar,  
Afghanistan**

**By Erica M. Gilmour, B.A. (Honours)**

A thesis submitted to:

The Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

In partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree

**Masters of Arts**

Department of Geography and Environmental Studies

Carleton University

© Erica Gilmour, 2007



Library and  
Archives Canada

Bibliothèque et  
Archives Canada

Published Heritage  
Branch

Direction du  
Patrimoine de l'édition

395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

395, rue Wellington  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

*Your file* *Votre référence*

*ISBN: 978-0-494-26943-5*

*Our file* *Notre référence*

*ISBN: 978-0-494-26943-5*

#### NOTICE:

The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

#### AVIS:

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protègent cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

---

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.

  
**Canada**

## **Abstract**

Using the sustainable livelihoods framework as a conceptual lens, this thesis explores the various ways in which rural Afghan women contribute to household livelihoods through agricultural activity in Charikar, Afghanistan. It examines the specific activities in which women participate, and investigates the way that this participation varies based on factors such as age, marital status, location and household structure. The research finds that women provide an important, and often underestimated, source of human capital for household livelihood strategies. It examines the frequent dichotomy between Afghan culture's ideal gender roles and the ways that women participate in household livelihoods in reality. In spite of this participation, the research illustrates the limited control and decision-making power that women have in agricultural pursuits. Widows enjoy the greatest autonomy; however they are most vulnerable due to inadequate access to resources and human capital.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank the Afghan women who inspired this research and opened their homes and lives to me during my several stays in Charikar. Their strength, generosity and openness will not be forgotten. I am very grateful to my research assistants, Zabeda and Deeba, who were willing to brave snowy roads, muddy paths and provided much laughter and friendship. Their input and dedication greatly strengthened the research process and outcome. I would like to acknowledge the support of Development Works Canada, which kindly provided the use of transport, staff, security and office space while conducting this research. I am especially grateful to my thesis supervisor, Michael Brklacich; thank you for your guidance, insight, patience and constant encouragement. I am grateful also to the valuable contribution that Derek Smith made to this thesis. Many thanks to Grandma and Grandpa Gilmour for all of the willing and loving babysitting. I am very grateful to my parents and sister for the years of continuous support and encouragement. Thank you to Hannah, my favourite distraction and motivation. And abundant gratitude to Drew, whose support, encouragement and constant supply of chocolate made this possible.

## Table of Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Rural Afghan Women and Household Livelihoods .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	The Afghan Context.....	2
1.2	Thesis Purpose and Objectives.....	4
1.3	Overview of the Thesis .....	6
<b>2</b>	<b>The Afghan Context: Events, Structures and Processes which Shape the Roles of Rural Women.....</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1	The Recent History of Conflict and War .....	10
2.2	Family, Tribe and Religion in Afghan Society .....	12
2.2.1	<i>The Family</i> .....	13
2.2.2	<i>Afghan Women</i> .....	14
2.3	Livelihoods in Afghanistan.....	15
2.3.1	<i>Agriculture and Household Livelihoods</i> .....	16
2.3.2	<i>Women and Livelihoods</i> .....	17
2.4	Conclusion .....	19
<b>3</b>	<b>Sustainable Livelihoods, Gender and Post Conflict Situations.....</b>	<b>20</b>
3.1	The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach .....	20
3.2	The Department for International Development’s Sustainable Livelihoods Framework .....	22
3.3	DFID’s SLF and the Rural Afghan Context: Strengths and Limitations.....	28
3.3.1	<i>Situations of Chronic Conflict and Political Instability (SCCPIs)</i> .....	28
3.3.2	<i>Sustainable Livelihoods and Gender</i> .....	30
3.4	Conclusion .....	32
<b>4</b>	<b>The Rural Afghan Research Context.....</b>	<b>34</b>
4.1	The Research Area: Charikar District .....	34
4.1.1	<i>Why Charikar?</i> .....	38
4.2	The Research Approach .....	42
4.2.1	<i>The Research Process</i> .....	43
4.2.2	<i>Research Challenges and Implications</i> .....	51
<b>5</b>	<b>The Contribution of Rural Women to Agriculture and Household Livelihoods.....</b>	<b>57</b>

5.1	Afghan Values often Differ from Actual Roles of Women in Agriculture.....	57
5.1.1	<i>The Agricultural Activities of Rural Women</i> .....	59
5.1.2	<i>The Limited Role of Women in Eastern Sadaqat</i> .....	61
5.2	Women’s Role in Agriculture is Dynamic.....	64
5.2.1	<i>The Traditional Roles</i> .....	67
5.2.2	<i>Widowhood and Female Heads of Households</i> .....	69
5.2.3	<i>The Strength of Tradition</i> .....	78
5.3	Women’s Participation Does Not Reflect Their Level of Control.....	83
5.4	Conclusion .....	88
<b>6</b>	<b>Summary and Conclusion .....</b>	<b>90</b>
6.1	Research Contributions and Areas for Future Research .....	91
6.1.1	<i>The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF)</i> .....	93
6.1.2	<i>Areas for Further Research</i> .....	94
6.2	Conclusion .....	95
	<b>References .....</b>	<b>96</b>
	<b>Appendices.....</b>	<b>100</b>

## **List of Tables**

Table 1: Livelihoods Assets	25
Table 2: Summary of Research Areas	40
Table 3: The Research Process	43
Table 4: Research Collaborators	47
Table 5: Women's Roles in Agriculture	58
Table 6: Women's Roles are Dynamic	66
Table 7: Women's Participation Does Not Reflect Their Control	83

## **List of Figures**

Figure 1: Map of Afghanistan	9
Figure 2: Sustainable Livelihoods Framework	23
Figure 3: Map of Charikar	35
Figure 4: Development Works' Sun-Dried Tomato Project	85

## **List of Appendices**

Appendix A: Initial Questionnaire	100
Appendix B: Revised Questionnaire	103
Appendix C: Initial Findings Shared with Participants	107
Appendix D: Follow-up Questions	110
Appendix E: Summary of Major Findings	112

## **1 Rural Afghan Women and Household Livelihoods**

The women began to trickle into the compound slowly, with babies in their arms, burqas covering their faces until they entered the shaded yard of the hostess. Sitting on the cushions spread beneath the branching mulberry trees, they slipped off their scarves and sipped tea. The meeting space would soon become a cacophony of raised voices, laughter and teasing, scolding of young children, a welcome break from hard work and frequent isolation. With every new arrival, the women greeted one another with kisses on the cheeks, two, three or even five times, depending on the relationship of the greeters. The village matriarchs held court as the younger women came to them humbly to kiss their hands, their weathered faces.

The meeting finally began an hour or so later, when I explained the Parwan Vegetable Dehydrates programme,<sup>1</sup> including the training, materials and transportation we would supply if the ladies would sun dry tomatoes in their homes for us to purchase. They listened politely, some with skepticism and some with eagerness; all agreed to speak to their husbands about it and let us know if they would participate. They asked questions, as often about my personal life as about the programme. With the formal part of the meeting finished some women hurried back to their homes and

---

<sup>1</sup> I was employed by the Parwan Vegetable Dehydrates Programme in 2004 and 2005. The programme was implemented by Development Works Canada (DWC), established a vegetable dehydration facility and worked with local farmers to increase yields, introduce new crops and supply vegetables to the factory for dehydration and sale to European buyers. As a part of this programme, DWC also implemented the Sun Dried Tomato Project for which women were trained in drying techniques, provided with materials and paid for tomatoes that were sun dried in their homes.

work while others stayed to sip tea and gossip with their neighbors. Curious about their lives, so very different from my own, I asked questions:

“What other work do the ladies do on the farms, aside from drying vegetables?”

“Oh, we don’t do very much; the men take care of the farms.”

“But, I’ve seen many ladies in the fields when I walk through the village. Do you help to plant in the spring?” I asked.

“Yes, we do a lot of planting.”

“And what about weeding?”

“Oh yes, we do most of the weeding!”

“And do you harvest?” I continued.

“We always help with the harvest.”

“It sounds like you do quite a lot,” I pointed out.

“Whatever the men are doing, we are there helping them.”

After spending weeks visiting villages and farms and speaking with both women and men, I realized that women play an essential and virtually unrecognized role in agricultural activities and household livelihoods. Agriculture is the very backbone of the central government’s plan to foster reconstruction and a revitalization of the Afghan economy. For this plan to succeed, it is essential to understand the details of how and by whom various agricultural activities are practiced.

### ***1.1 The Afghan Context***

After twenty-five years of conflict and political instability, most Afghans are attempting to begin again. Although the elected Karzai government does not have complete control over some parts of the country, many refugees and internally

displaced persons have returned to their homes and begun to rebuild homes, farms and lives. Signs of normalcy exist in places such as Charikar, Parwan Province, with busy market places, new construction and children returning to schools. Poverty is widespread, but many Afghans are hopeful about the future.

Most Afghans derive their livelihoods from multiple sources, however it is commonly cited that approximately 80 per cent of Afghans participate in agricultural activity (Grace and Pain 2004). The agriculture sector has been severely stressed from the years of conflict and drought, with irrigation canals in disrepair, fields planted with landmines and many assets sold for survival. Agriculture tends to be a family affair, with nuclear or extended families working together to cultivate a variety of produce for local and regional sale and household consumption. All household members, including women and children, contribute to agricultural production, although the types and level of participation vary greatly.

In the rural areas, there are very few livelihood options aside from agriculture, especially for women. This is compounded by the fact that Afghanistan experiences very low literacy rates, with 47.2 per cent of men being able to read and write and only 15 per cent of women (“Geography” 2007). Widows and female-headed households are particularly vulnerable as they often have little work experience and few assets available for the pursuit of livelihoods.

Afghan culture, based on tribal traditions and Islam, prescribe every aspect of life for both women and men. In a country that has never experienced a strong central government, family is the strongest and most important institution. Afghan families consist of a hierarchical structure, with a male head of household and strict gender roles

which outline women's lives. As such, the lives of rural Afghan women must be considered within the context of the household dynamic.

### ***1.2 Thesis Purpose and Objectives***

During the summer of 2004 I began working with Development Works Canada on a project which engaged Afghan women in the Charikar area to sun dry tomatoes for European export. This project required me to spend my days traveling to over thirty villages within a 25 kilometer radius to speak with farming women and men about their agricultural activities.

This experience was not only the impetus for the research topic, but also the opportunity to explore it. As I walked through these villages, I observed the women working in the fields alone or with male relatives, planting, weeding, watering, harvesting. I discussed this with my male colleagues who were surprised at the observation. The reason for this was evident one day when I visited a village with a male colleague from Kenya. As we walked past fields which were in the process of being planted, we saw only the occasional man or boy working in them, and sometimes a bright flash of streaming cloth as a woman darted behind a nearby wall at the first sight of strange men coming towards her. The invisibility of women's contribution to agriculture is a major impediment to rejuvenating household livelihoods.

These experiences led me to informally explore the roles that women play in agriculture through my work in Charikar. At meetings with male farmers, I would ask them about what types of activities for which their wives or other female relatives were responsible. The answer, more often than not, was that they were in charge of maintaining the house, and their assistance in the fields was often not mentioned. This

can be explained by social restrictions which make men hesitant to speak about their wives and female relatives to a stranger, even a woman. When I spoke to the women, they diminished their roles as farmers, saying that their husbands did most of the work but they would sometimes help. However with further inquiry, I found that the women were working many hours in the fields, participated in a wide variety of agricultural activities, and were solely responsible for several areas, such as livestock maintenance, vegetable drying and sorting.

As agriculture is such an important component to livelihood strategies in Afghanistan, it is essential to appreciate the details of agricultural practices within households. To date, the household division of labour and the role that women play in agricultural activity in Afghanistan is not well understood. The past and ongoing conflict situation influences the livelihoods, vulnerability and coping strategies of Afghan families. Additionally, Grace and Pain (2004) propose that the lack of recognition of women's involvement in agriculture actually leads to women earning less income than their male counterparts. Many aid programmes and Afghan government programmes focus agricultural activities almost exclusively on men, without recognizing the crucial roles of Afghan women in agriculture which in turn suggests Afghan households are being deprived of programme benefits.

Therefore, this research will:

***Evaluate the differential roles that Afghan women play in primary and secondary agricultural activities in Charikar District, Parwan Province***

This research purpose is posed with the understanding that gender roles and livelihood approaches are not static or universal. In any situation, these roles would be constantly changing, but this is especially true in Afghanistan, given the political turmoil that continues to influence every aspect of life.

In order to achieve the research purpose, the following objectives have been outlined:

- Identify the economic and agricultural activities in which women generally participate.
- Appreciate how participation in agricultural activities varies amongst women based on differences such as wealth, age, marital status and location.
- Explore the circumstances which constrain or enhance opportunities for women to participate in agricultural activities (such as access to resources, freedom of movement / communication, literacy, familiarity with technology, social customs, preferences, drought and conflict).

### ***1.3 Overview of the Thesis***

This chapter presented the genesis of the research, briefly introduced the research context and outlined the purpose and objectives of the thesis. Chapter Two will explore the Afghan context in greater detail in order to appropriately situate the research project. Chapter Three will examine the concept of Sustainable Livelihoods, looking at relevant research in the field and the advantages and constraints to utilizing this framework to conduct the research project. Chapter Four presents the research approach and process, explaining in detail how the research was conducted. Chapter

Five explores the research results and highlights the outcomes and lessons learned.

Chapter Six provides a summary, research contributions, possible further areas for research and general conclusions.

## **2 The Afghan Context: Events, Structures and Processes which Shape the Roles of Rural Women**

Ravaged by war, drought and poverty, Afghanistan is struggling to recover from the devastating consequences of the past twenty-five years. Across the country, roads, homes, schools, and irrigation systems are damaged or destroyed. In a few places, such as Kabul, a construction boom is occurring as people rebuild and invest in Afghanistan's future. Elsewhere, reconstruction is more tempered, with limited resources, rural families are slowly attempting to rebuild homes and lives. With the economy at a virtual standstill during the period of conflict, markets have opened with renewed vigour. Most Afghans are moving on with a mixture of expectation and uncertainty, altered but hopeful.

Afghanistan ranks second to last in the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Human Development Index (UNDP 2004). Partly attributable to limited health care and widespread malnutrition, life expectancy at birth is now 44.5 years for the average Afghan (UNDP 2004). The overall literacy rate is 28.7 per cent, but is considerably less for women and girls with estimates ranging from five per cent to 14 per cent ("The Status of Women in Afghanistan" 2004, UN Economic and Social Council 2002).

The country's wide range of ethnic and religious groups has long co-existed, although with frequent tensions and conflict. The most recent series of conflicts have had immense impacts on every aspect of life in Afghanistan, causing extensive damage



to housing and infrastructure and greatly taxing cultural norms and social institutions and human well-being.

### ***2.1 The Recent History of Conflict and War***

The early twentieth century saw a loose network of diverse tribes and ethnic groups coalesce and formed into the modern state of Afghanistan.<sup>2</sup> From the beginning of this state, there has been a tension between two distinct groups: the left-leaning urban intelligentsia (especially in Kabul) who were nationalistic and supportive of western ideas and technologies and the conservative religious traditionalists (led by the Pashtuns in the south and eastern borderlands) who tended to be rather xenophobic, religious and strived to maintain their identity and traditions (Vogelsang 2002). In 1973, Dawud Khan, supported by the army and communist party, seized power from the ruling monarch, King Zahir Shah who was forced to abdicate the throne. Many see this as the beginning of the recent conflicts, as Islamists were pushed out of the country to Pakistan where they formed a resistance movement and the Soviet Union seized the opportunity to move into the country (Vogelsang 2002). In December, 1979, Soviet troops arrived in Afghanistan amidst political upheaval and uncertainty and quickly occupied Kabul and other major urban centres. Almost immediately, a resistance movement began, led by “Mujahadin,” who attacked Soviet forces and then quickly retreated into the Afghan mountains (Norchi 1996).

War quickly spread across the country with devastating consequences for the Afghan people. Kabul’s population of 600,000 tripled in size as refugees fled the

---

<sup>2</sup> A brief discussion of recent events is presented here in order to provide a context for this research on the lives of rural women in contemporary Afghanistan. For a thorough treatment of Afghanistan’s complex history, see (Vogelsang 2002, Rubin 2000, Ewans 2002 ).

countryside, approximately 650,000 Shiites fled to Iran, and an estimated 2.8 million people went to Pakistan by 1983 (Norchi 1996). Of thirteen million Afghans, almost five million became refugees while another million were internally displaced (Norchi 1996). The country was planted with millions of landmines and almost every Afghan experienced the loss of a friend or family member. Further, agricultural production, the means of livelihood for the majority of Afghans prior to the Soviet invasion, came to a stop as people were displaced, fields were burned or destroyed and villages were razed (Norchi 1996).

In 1988, international groups helped to negotiate a withdrawal plan for Soviet troops and the establishment of an Afghan government. In February 1989, the Soviet army completely withdrew from Afghanistan, beginning a new period of internal conflict for the country (Vogelsang 2002). The next several years saw the overthrow of several Afghan governments and intense fighting between various religious, ethnic, tribal and political factions which frequently changed alliances. The city of Kabul experienced intense battles with entire portions of the city demolished and many of its citizens fleeing. By February 1994, fighting had spread across the entire country and law and order largely vanished.

Out of this chaos rose the Taliban, a religious, Pashtun group from the southern province of Kandahar with links to Pakistan. The Taliban quickly gained in popularity in the southern and eastern regions, supported by Pashtuns opposed to the largely Tajik “mujahadin” with links to the Central Asian former Soviet republics. With control of the south and west of the country, the Taliban entered Kabul on 26 September 1996 after ethnic Tajik leader, Masoud, withdrew his forces to just north of Kabul

(Vogelsang 2002). Over the next several years, the Shomali Plain, where this research took place, was the site of intense fighting between the Taliban and Masoud's forces. By 2001 the Taliban controlled all of the country except for the northern province of Badakshan and the central Panjshir Valley which were controlled by Masoud. The situation for Afghan civilians was desperate, with constant fighting, oppressive fundamentalist rule by the Taliban, an international boycott and drought devastating the country (Vogelsang 2002).

With the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York on 11 September 2001, the U.S. government and the international community again turned to the conflict in Afghanistan. With the intention of capturing insurgent leader Osama bin Laden and ousting the Taliban government, U.S. forces supported the Afghan Northern Alliance ground forces with air support. Taliban positions in the northern city of Mazar I Sharif and on the Shomali Plain were heavily bombed and quickly taken over by the Northern Alliance which moved towards Kabul (Ewans 2002). The Taliban fled Kabul, with members either fleeing to Pakistan or melting into the villages.

With UN and international support, an elected government has now been established in the country under President Hamid Karzai. Although progress has been made in reconstruction efforts and security, local warlords and remnant Taliban elements continue to cause instability in parts of the country.

## ***2.2 Family, Tribe and Religion in Afghan Society***

The years of conflict and massive population displacement caused untold stress on Afghanistan's social institutions which are shaped by tribal traditions and Islam. Tribal traditions practiced for countless generations are the basis for modern society,

although Islamic influences have become more important in recent decades. In modern Afghanistan, these tribal traditions are the greatest factor in determining the roles of Afghan women. Central to Afghan culture are the issues of patriarchy, honour and the family. Family is the most important institution in Afghanistan and honour is the basis of all social status for both men and women. Women act as the symbols of honour, representing a family's values and morality, which is why Afghan men so strictly control and protect the details of a woman's life (Dupree 2004). In discussing Afghan culture, Nancy Hatch Dupree contends that in spite of the various ethnic groups which make up the country, Afghans do have a collective sense of "being Afghan" (2002: 978).

### 2.2.1 *The Family*

In Afghan society, the importance of family takes precedence over the importance of the individual. Individuals who place themselves before the family are seen as selfish and risk bringing dishonour to the family. "The hierarchical structure within families leaves little room for individualism, for senior male members, the ultimate arbiters, maintain family honor and social status by ensuring all members conform to prescribed forms of acceptable behavior" (Dupree 2004: 312). It is common for extended families to live together within a walled compound, often with individual buildings or spaces for nuclear family groups and a shared interior courtyard. With the oldest male acting as the head of the household, gender roles within families tend to be highly delineated along with male and female spaces. The family unit is designed to protect all family members and provide security, education and economic well-being. The role of the family has been especially important due to

the weak, sometimes non-existent, central government which for much of the country's history has not been able to provide a social safety net (Dupree 2004).

### 2.2.2 *Afghan Women*

Because of the importance of family life, it is almost impossible to consider the lives of Afghan women separately from the household dynamic. In the family structure, men act as the connection with the outside world while women's focus is on managing the home, raising children and taking care of the family (Moghadam 1994). The activities and movements of women are completely controlled by men. If a woman does something which is considered to be shameful then the man did not adequately control the woman and the family's social status is compromised. Women living in rural areas generally have more freedom of movement than urban women because most villages are established in kin-related groupings (Barakat and Wardell 2002). Dupree (2004) contends that in the rural areas livelihood roles are more interconnected with women playing an important part in the household economy, affording them significant status.

Afghan women have been politicized by a variety of groups, and issues surrounding equality, rights and tradition have frequently fuelled the flames of the past 25 years of tension and conflict. Moghadam asserts that Afghan women have been captive to "...the persistence of a particularly entrenched form of patriarchy and tribal-based social structure in which only men have rights, equality, and unlimited access to public space" (2002:19). Tradition and modernization, and particularly how they relate to women, have been and continue to be a contributing factor to the political struggles of Afghanistan. Modernizers in the 1920s attempted to provide education and rights to

women with much resistance from traditionalists. The Marxist movements of the late 1970s and 1980s experienced substantial changes in the rights of mostly urban women, who were prevalent in the government work force and higher education system. These developments were used by Islamic traditionalists as a rallying cry to oppose the government and Soviet occupation. Following the Soviet ouster by the Mujahidin, women again started to wear the burqa in public places. And most infamously, the Taliban instituted previously unheard of regulations about the actions, dress and movement of all women.

### ***2.3 Livelihoods in Afghanistan***

Livelihoods in Afghanistan are diverse, flexible and have often been derived from multiple sources (Pain and Lautze 2002). Grace and Pain (2004) have found that most Afghan households have varied income sources with the average household having between three to six sources. Accumulation is generally the strategy for wealthier families, while poor households utilize diverse livelihood options as a coping device (Grace and Pain 2004).

The composition of the household greatly affects livelihood options; in cases where there are few men of working age, livelihood options tend to be quite limited and less diverse. However, a large family does not necessarily determine greater wealth, as other circumstances such as assets, education and health also play a great role. Of special interest is the fact that Grace and Pain (2004) found that non-farm labour was determined to be the most important income source for the poorest families in most villages. Still, it is generally accepted by the aid community and Afghan government

that as much as 80 per cent of the population participate in agricultural activities as indicated in a country wide study in 1978 (Multi-Donor Mission 2002).

In village-level studies, Bhatia et al. (2003) found that for the average post-conflict Afghan family vulnerability has increased, with eroded assets and capital, diversified livelihoods, and a minimization of risky economic activities and investment being undertaken. However, Bhatia et al. contend that “there is a great deal of variety from area to area, and livelihood strategies depend upon a complex range of factors, including location (core/periphery); security regimes (level of stability and instability, and resulting political vulnerability); the proximity of borders; and access to roads, markets and water....In Afghanistan, ‘place’ matters” (2003:74).

### *2.3.1 Agriculture and Household Livelihoods*

Agriculture is a key component of livelihoods for rural Afghans and has experienced substantial challenges over the past 25 years of conflict, and more recently, drought. Agriculture in rural Afghanistan is generally practiced by the entire household with each member playing an important role in contributing to the household’s livelihood. However, the agriculture sector continues to function and serves an important role in the livelihoods of rural Afghans (Pain and Lautze 2002).

The variety of climates and geographies in Afghanistan has contributed to the degree to which agriculture is used as a source of livelihood. Although the common view is that agriculture is the main source of livelihood for Afghans, it generally is not the only source of livelihood. Additionally, production levels have varied greatly in the past 25 years since the Soviet period when agricultural production dropped, rising dramatically again in the 1990s and then falling again from 1998 due to drought (Pain

and Lautze 2002). Conflict and drought have required households to implement flexible coping approaches such as mobility. Furthermore, events such as conflict and drought have caused livelihood changes including movement, diversifying livelihoods, diminishing assets and decreased activity in agriculture.

Christoplos contends that the “crisis” of Afghan agriculture is not so much the years of conflict as “the gradual erosion of formal institutions, infrastructure and market structures, and the ample opportunities for predatory behaviour by local commanders...” (2004: 7). The agricultural sector was quickly recovering under Taliban rule in the late 1990’s due in large part to relative stability and security, but weakened with the onset of drought, which had an overall greater impact in many ways than conflict (Christoplos 2004). There is disagreement among researchers about the extent to which rural Afghan livelihoods have gravitated from subsistence agriculture to commercial production and the pursuit of diverse livelihood strategies and what long-term affect this has on cash crop production (Longley et al. 2006). Furthermore, research in Sierra Leone and Afghanistan show that it is often unclear how farmers alter their agricultural practices to cope with conflict and if these are short-term coping strategies or long term adaptive behaviour (Longley et al. 2006).

### *2.3.2 Women and Livelihoods*

The livelihood options available to women are limited and vary greatly geographically. At one time, Kabul had a relative abundance of well-educated women professionals, including engineers, doctors and lawyers, largely trained during the Soviet period. Elsewhere, career options have always been more limited, especially in

the rural areas where agriculture occupies the majority of the population. Generally, farming is a family affair, all members contribute to some extent to the household livelihood, although, as this research shows this varies greatly depending on a variety of factors.

Women who are poor, urban and landless are often forced to seek employment outside of the family. They can find work as cleaners, laundresses, seamstresses, farm labourers, although pursuing these activities brings dishonour to them and their families. Social norms are relaxed for those with no other options to support their families.

Afghan women are especially vulnerable to fluctuations in livelihoods. There are structural causes of vulnerability for women, especially for female-headed households, including limited access to resources and social structures which often inhibit the livelihood options of women (Grace and Pain 2004). Years of conflict have left many women as heads of households which has enormous implications for their livelihoods. There are very few income activities available to women, causing female headed households to experience a seventy per cent poverty rate, compared to 53 per cent for the population as a whole (Grace and Pain 2004). Although social norms are somewhat more relaxed for widows, most outside employment in rural areas is either not available or is not considered acceptable.

Land tenure for widows is a complex issue. Legally, widows have the right to inherit their late husband's land, but in practice, it is often socially accepted that male family members take over farming activities and ownership. Legal systems are rudimentary at best and often favour male applicants. If the husband's family decides

to take a widow's land, there is little that the widow can do. Additionally, she does not have full control over the land, being unable to sell it. The land will be inherited by a son if she has one, or by a male relative of her husband's. In a survey conducted by Grace and Pain (2004) in seven provinces in Afghanistan, they found that only 1.87 per cent of women surveyed owned land; however, more women own livestock and have complete responsibilities for managing livestock.

#### **2.4 Conclusion**

The historical social and political context of Afghanistan influences the way that women function in Afghan households and participate in livelihoods. The long period of conflict and instability has greatly affected agriculture and social customs, although the extent is still greatly unknown. The concept of family honour is key to understanding traditional Afghan culture and impacts every aspect of day to day life. The family is the most important social institution and serves as a social safety net in times of stress. The roles of women must be considered in the context of the household unit.

### **3 Sustainable Livelihoods, Gender and Post Conflict Situations**

The concept of sustainable livelihoods has been developed as an approach to analyzing, responding to and evaluating poverty in the developing world. There is a wealth of literature on the development and application of sustainable livelihoods concepts, including research on the topics of gender and conflict-prone regions. Using the UK's Department for International Development's (DFID) Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) as a starting point, this research draws especially on the areas of human capital, social capital and transformative processes including gender roles and culture. The next section will review these themes.

#### ***3.1 The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach***

Evolving from the disciplines of political economy and anthropology, Chambers and Conway (1992) conceptualized and developed the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) to development and poverty reduction options. Their model addresses poverty from the bottom-up, while recognizing the structural meso and macro level factors which influence household livelihoods. The approach also recognized the diverse and complex local realities which determined the livelihood options of the poor (Schafer 2002). The SLA was emerging as "sustainability" was gaining popularity in the development and environmental spheres, leading scholars to marry earlier livelihoods research with sustainable development research.

Chambers and Conway examined the concept of sustainable rural livelihoods by exploring the fundamental ideas of “capability, equity and sustainability” (1992: 1). These concepts are seen as both an ends and means for sustainable livelihoods and constitute a framework for development thinking. Capability refers to “being able to cope with stress and shocks, and being able to find and make use of livelihood opportunities” while equity broadly encompasses the fair “distribution of assets, capabilities and opportunities” (Chambers and Conway 1992:4). Sustainability refers to both environmental and social sustainability. They state that livelihoods are environmentally sustainable when they do not contribute to global or local environmental problems or physical degradation. Social sustainability refers to the ability to “maintain and improve livelihoods while maintaining or enhancing the local and global assets and capabilities on which livelihoods depend” (Chambers and Conway 1992:5).

Using the above concepts as an integrating approach, Chambers and Conway derive the following definition for sustainable livelihoods:

*A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living; a livelihood is sustainable which can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation; and which contributes net benefits to other*

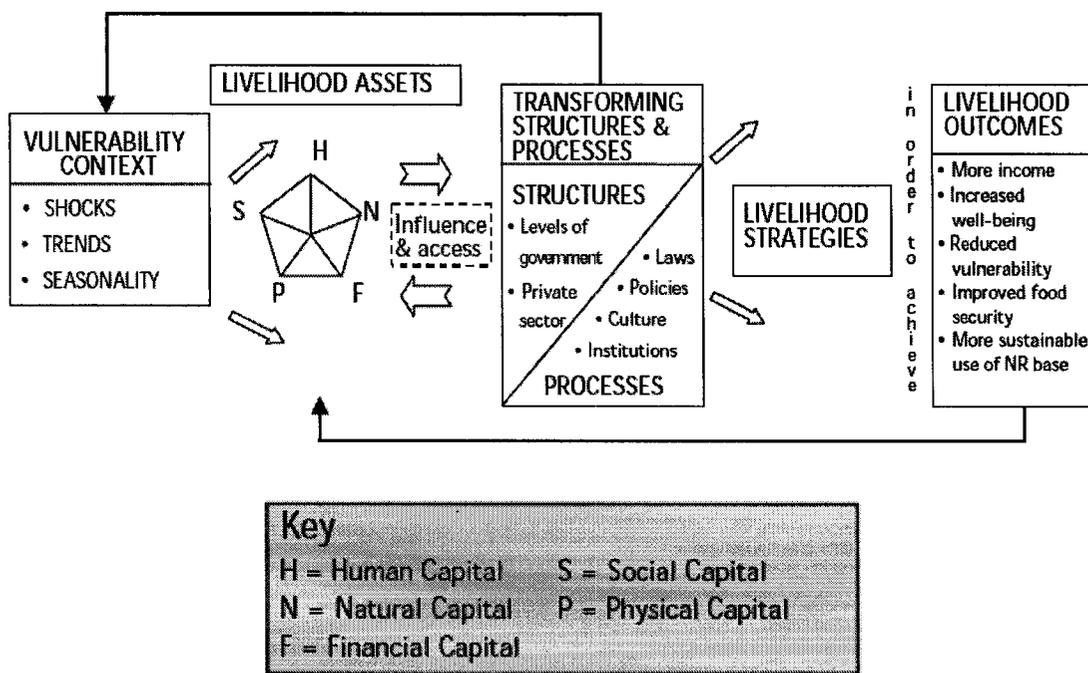
*livelihoods at the local and global levels in the short and long term (1992:6).*

The Sustainable Livelihoods approach has evolved into both a conceptual framework for understanding poverty issues and an analytical tool used by the development community to create effective programming to decrease poverty and vulnerability.

### ***3.2 The Department for International Development's Sustainable Livelihoods Framework***

The United Kingdom's Department for International Development created a sustainable livelihoods framework as a tool for better understanding the livelihoods of the poor with the goal of decreasing poverty (DFID 1999). A number of international and local non governmental organizations (NGO), including CARE and Oxfam, and UN agencies including the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), have adapted the SLF to meet their needs and direct development programming. The DFID model has been widely accepted and adopted in both development and academic settings. The specific applications of the DFID approach by other agencies has not radically refashioned the DFID approach, therefore, the DFID framework will inform my research. Figure 2 provides an overview of the SLF and in this research, it will be used to steer the research design.

**Figure 2: Sustainable Livelihoods Framework**



\*from "DFID Sustainable Livelihoods Guidance Sheets: Framework Introduction," April 1999.

According to the DFID Sustainable Livelihoods Guidance Sheet, the framework is designed to illustrate the multi sectoral and complex factors which influence livelihoods (1999). It is not meant to be used in a linear fashion, but it shows the flow and multi layered reality of livelihoods, with each section impacting the others. The SLF illustrates the circular flow between each part and the way that they impact each other. For example, access to assets impact livelihood outcomes while livelihood outcomes affect access to assets. The SLF is designed to be adapted to local realities and does not include an exhaustive treatment of factors which are at play. One can begin using the framework from any point, and may focus on one or more aspects as

appropriate. A brief description of the concepts upon which I will be drawing for this research follows.<sup>3</sup>

### ***The Vulnerability Context***

The vulnerability context encompasses the external atmosphere in which people live and pursue livelihoods. The DFID framework does not attempt to exhaustively describe the vulnerability context, but rather looks at the major shocks, trends and seasonal issues which affect livelihoods. Trends include governance, resources and population, among other things, and can influence the livelihood strategies available to households. Shocks can include natural disasters, conflict and disease and directly destroy assets or force people to use a variety of coping strategies which can in turn deplete assets. The seasonal shifts in employment, prices and health have an unequal impact on the poor in developing countries.

The vulnerability context is the aspect of livelihoods over which people have the least amount of control. For this reason, coping and adaptive strategies become an important part of responding to external vulnerabilities, although this is not dealt with explicitly in the SLF. A frequent criticism of the DFID framework has been that it possesses a weak conceptualization of vulnerability (Schafer 2002).

### ***Livelihood Assets***

Livelihood assets are central to poor people's ability to negotiate the vulnerability context and seek livelihood strategies. They are key to the bottom-up, people-centered approach of the SLF and seek to begin the process of understanding

---

<sup>3</sup> Taken from the DFID Sustainable Livelihoods Framework Guidance Sheets 2.1 – 2.6.

livelihoods by examining people's strengths. Possessing a range of assets is essential to limiting vulnerability and enhancing livelihood outcomes. It is also important to consider the way that each asset relates to others. For example, physical capital in the form of land ownership can translate into additional financial capital or social capital by raising status within the community. Additionally, it is necessary to consider a household's ability to access and control assets. For example, widows in Afghanistan may legally own land, but due to cultural traditions may not actually be able to use or sell it. The complex relationship between assets must be considered in order to gain a complete picture of how they affect livelihood strategies.

Livelihood assets are illustrated in the shape of a pentagon in order to visibly represent their constantly changing nature and the way that they impact upon one another. The following chart describes DFID's structuring of assets (taken from DFID Sustainable Livelihoods Guidance Sheets 2.3.1 – 2.3.5):

<b>Table 1: Livelihood Assets</b>	
<b>Asset</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Human Capital	The skills, knowledge, ability to labour and good health that allow people to pursue livelihood strategies.
Social Capital	The social resources, including associations and institutions, that people can access to pursue livelihoods.
Natural Capital	The natural resources which people utilize to pursue livelihood options. These include land, water, air, forests, etc.
Physical Capital	The infrastructure and producer goods that are necessary to pursue livelihoods.
Financial Capital	The financial resources available for livelihood strategies, including available stocks and regular inflows of money.

Of special importance to this research is an understanding of the impact of human capital on livelihood security. The amount and quality of labour available to a household affects household livelihood options. In addition to being an essential building block to achieving positive livelihood outcomes, human capital can be seen as an end in itself. Health and education are important to quality of life, in addition to contributing to livelihoods and decreasing poverty.

The interplay of human capital with the other aspects of the livelihood framework is important to consider when examining the limitations and opportunities for positive livelihood outcomes. For example, structures and processes such as governance or gender roles affect the availability of opportunities to improve human capital. Gender roles, culture and power affect the ability of some family members, particularly women, to gain education. This, in turn, impacts access to other assets and available livelihood strategies. Culture and gender roles also determine the way that the human capital in a household can be used. Strict gender roles may severely limit the livelihood strategies available to some households, for example, when it is not culturally acceptable for women to work outside of the home.

To a lesser extent, social capital is also an important asset to consider in this research. Although the meaning of social capital is widely debated, in the context of the DFID SLF it is defined as “the social resources upon which people draw in pursuit of their livelihood objectives” (DFID 1999: 2.3.2). Social capital is accessed through social networking, membership in formal groups, and informal safety nets which feature “relationships of trust, reciprocity and exchanges” (DFID 1999: 2.3.2). While social capital has intrinsic value, it also plays an important role as a social safety net for

vulnerable people experiencing unexpected shocks or stresses. Social capital is difficult to measure and, unlike other types of assets, tends to increase the more that it is used. In times of increased vulnerability, people may deplete other assets and need to rely more on social networks which may be strengthened. However, social capital is not always positive as it can be used to exclude minority or disadvantaged groups.

### ***Transforming Structures and Processes: Culture and Gender Roles***

The policies, laws, institutions and organisations which affect livelihood options are an important cross-cutting aspect to the framework. Micro, meso and macro level structures and processes directly impact the vulnerability context, assets, livelihood strategies and outcomes of people. There is a reciprocal relationship of influence and access between transforming structures and processes and livelihood assets which must be considered when analyzing livelihood strategies and outcomes. Transforming structures and processes determine access to all types of capital, livelihoods strategies and decision making. Conversely, there may be a relationship between access to assets and influence on transforming structures and processes. For example, the wealthy may be better able to influence the political arena, thereby reducing their vulnerability.

Processes determine the way in which structures function and include areas such as policies, legislation, institutions, culture and power relations. Culture, including societal norms and beliefs, and power relations such as age, gender roles and class are the most important processes to this research. Many development efforts are aimed at bettering policies, legislation and institutions to create an environment that

will benefit the poor. Culture and power relations are not as easily defined and development activities generally do not intervene in those processes, attempting rather to understand and work within the existing structure to assist the poor to better their livelihoods. Processes can determine access to assets and the livelihood strategies that are available to a group of people.

### ***3.3 DFID's SLF and the Rural Afghan Context: Strengths and Limitations***

#### ***3.3.1 Situations of Chronic Conflict and Political Instability (SCCPIs)***

The years of ongoing conflict in Afghanistan provide unique circumstances and challenges for the pursuit of sustainable livelihoods, making literature related to Situations of Chronic Conflict and Political Instability (SCCPIs) particularly relevant.

Several authors have stated that in SCCPIs, the focus should be on the vulnerability of livelihoods, rather than their sustainability (Pain and Lautze 2002, Young et al. 2002). One alternate definition for livelihoods states that:

*Livelihoods comprise the ways in which people access and mobilize resources that enable them to pursue goals necessary for their survival and longer-term well-being, and thereby reduce the vulnerability created and exacerbated by conflict (Young et al. 2002).*

SCCPIs experience common elements and a unique vulnerability context which is characterized by:

- “a state in which public institutions (executive, judicial, legislative) are seriously weakened or non-existent
- external legitimacy of the state is withheld or contested
- strong parallel or extra-legal economy
- existence of, or high susceptibility to, violence
- forced displacement: refugees and internally displaced people
- sections of the population are deliberately excluded from enjoying basic rights
- livelihoods are highly vulnerable to external shocks
- the existence of serious poverty” (Schafer 2002:2)

According to Pain and Lautze (2002), the DFID Sustainable Livelihoods Framework does not adequately conceptualize these vulnerabilities in SCCPIs. They adopt the following definition for vulnerability:

*The risk of harm to people’s resources as a result of the inability to counter external threats arising from conflict, or as a result of inherited or ascribed traits such as gender, class, race/ethnicity, age, etc., made salient by the nature of the conflict.*

This definition focuses on the vulnerability of livelihoods rather than their sustainability. Households cope with shocks such as conflict by utilizing their own asset base and will attempt to protect their livelihoods above all else, including food security and family honour.

The DFID SLF does not explicitly detail the variety of livelihood strategies available to households, especially in SCCPIs. Pain and Lautze (2002) outline four main strategies:

- Accumulation strategies attempt to augment financial capital and other assets as possible.
- Adaptive strategies are used in response to long-term risks or short-term shocks and attempt to vary income strategies.
- Coping strategies seek to lessen the impact of short-term shocks by changing the balance of assets or searching for other sources of livelihoods
- Survival strategies are used as a last resort and often result in depleting assets and risking the sustainability of household livelihoods.

In SCCPIs, enhancing resilience and lessening vulnerability are important goals of livelihood strategies and outcomes.

### *3.3.2 Sustainable Livelihoods and Gender*

The framework does not explicitly illustrate the affect that micro level power relationships and gender have on livelihood outcomes and gender is often ignored in analysis of livelihood strategies (Oberhauser et al. 2004). Although this research focuses on the sustainable livelihoods of households by looking at the role of women, gender studies can add some depth to the examination.

Gender studies have recognized the importance of examining power relations in order to understand livelihood strategies (de Haan and Zoomers 2005). Rather than the classical “sovereign power” proposed by Foucault, gender studies recognizes the

importance of “disciplinary power’ – the kind of power that is normal to us, that is unquestioningly accepted, that cannot be possessed, but exists only when exercised” (de Haan and Zoomers 2005:36). De Haan and Zoomers contend that livelihoods analysis should consider women’s “wielding and yielding” power as described by Villareal which evolves from the concept of structure and agency to assert that women have room to negotiate within relationships and that they are involved in their subordination (2005). Therefore, women have the power to change their positions through the wielding and yielding process.

In addition to discussions of power, gender analysis also examines women’s empowerment through economic activity (Masika and Joekes 1996). Kabeer introduced a definition of empowerment that differentiated between the “power to” and “power over” (1994). “Power to” includes the ability to control micro level decision making, especially at the household level. Some research has established linkages between a woman’s access to income and her power to make decisions at the household level (Masika and Joekes 1996). Moving from the personal level to the macro, “power over” refers to women’s abilities to impact and control political structures and institutions (Kabeer 1994).

In reference to the “power to,” the literature demonstrates that the fact that women’s activities generate income does not necessarily translate into being able to use that income. Ackerly cites the example of women in Bangladesh who complete most of the labour for processing rice paddies into puffed rice using credit (1995). However, the men of the household have access to the markets and therefore have true economic control of the process. Steady, paid work empowers women more than irregular, non

paid work which is valued less by women and men alike. Masika and Joeke qualify the above by suggesting that agricultural research has not sufficiently investigated issues of female empowerment but instead has focused on land property rights and access to resources (1996).

Women are often in secondary positions to men within agricultural systems and have less control over assets, resources and profits. Additionally, there is evidence that female labour is underreported due to research methods which do not always include agricultural activities in which women often participate such as threshing and food processing (Masika and Joeke 1996:11).

In reference to agricultural activity, gender studies and rural geography have examined the concepts of women and “work” and, specifically, the role of the “farm wife.” Encouraged by Marxian approaches, early feminist geographers contended that the contributions of women were lost in conventional examinations of the farming industry due to a narrow definition of work (Little and Panelli 2003). Research about women’s contributions to farming found that women’s activities were highly adaptable depending on circumstances and the requirements of the farm (Little and Panelli 2003). Recently, research has evolved to comprise concepts of gender identity, finding that there are often “significant variations in the experiences of women based on place, class and age” (Little and Pannelli 2003).

### **3.4 Conclusion**

Development actors commonly use the SLF as a tool for analyzing and addressing poverty issues in the developing world. Using the SLF to examine gender roles in agriculture in Afghanistan situates the research in the development field,

making it possible for the results to directly impact the way that development programmes are designed and implemented in Afghanistan.

The flexibility of the SLF allows a focus on the areas of human capital, social capital, culture and gender roles. The research explores the quality and quantity of human capital available to Afghan households by focusing on the contribution which women make to household livelihoods. The concept of social capital is also important as the research seeks to identify the ways in which women are included in or excluded from social networks and the impact this may have on livelihood strategies. Culture, and specifically, gender roles, is the most important shaper of the way that women participate in livelihoods. Although these are the main aspects of the SLF which shape the research, examining the SLF as a whole situates the key concepts into the greater context and deepens understanding of the way these aspects interact.

## **4 The Rural Afghan Research Context**

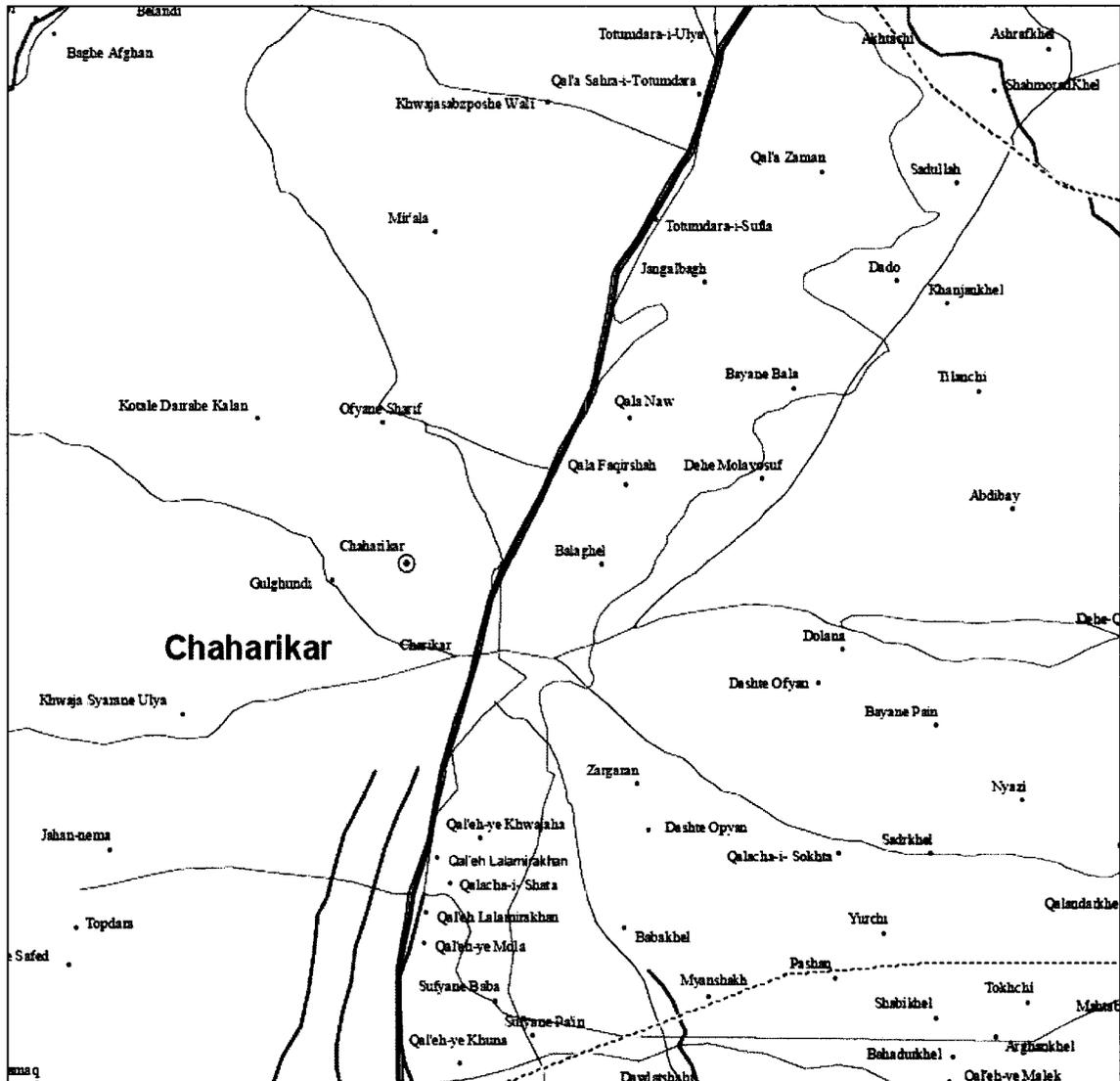
### ***4.1 The Research Area: Charikar District***

The district of Charikar, located in the central Afghan province of Parwan, is bounded by mountains and features a long, broad, fertile valley called the Shomali Plain. In many respects, Charikar's proximity to the capital city of Kabul, 65 kilometers south, and having the national highway sited through the area has rendered it the cross roads of Afghanistan.

During the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989, the area around Charikar became a battle ground among communist, Muslim and nationalist forces, killing thousands and causing vast population displacement. International de-mining groups continue to find and remove the thousands of anti-tank and anti-personnel landmines that were planted in the area.

After the Soviet pullout of 1989, the area continued to experience instability and conflict as numerous Afghan factions struggled to gain power over the country. Important to the Charikar area was the rise of the Northern Alliance and its' military leader, Ahmed Shah Massoud. Massoud, an ethnic Tajik, played a key role in driving out the Soviets, and later in leading the resistance against the Taliban. He was known as the Lion of Panjshir, a fertile mountainous region about 50 kilometers north of Charikar. The ethnic Tajik population in the Charikar area is loyal to the memory of Massoud, who was assassinated on September 9, 2001. Many of the men in Charikar

Figure 3: Map of Charikar



\*Taken from UN Afghanistan Information Management Systems (AIMS) website, Map of Chaharlikar, [www.aims.org/af](http://www.aims.org/af)

fought with his Northern Alliance troops and many families traveled to Panjshir where they received protection during the extended period of conflict.<sup>4</sup>

This incessant conflict and instability in Afghanistan had a direct impact on the lives of Charikar residents. Property and homes were destroyed, massive population movements were experienced and almost every family suffered a loss of a family member. According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), 10 per cent of homes in Charikar were destroyed (2002). Most irrigation systems were either damaged in the conflict and many remain in a state of disrepair. Returning farmers indicate that the current drought and destroyed irrigation systems are major impediments to restarting agricultural activity.

Since the Taliban was driven from power in late 2001, life has slowly begun to return to “normal” in Charikar. With an estimated population of 200,000, the district consists of the urban city of Charikar, an important hub for Parwan Province and neighboring Kapisa and Panjshir provinces, and 30 surrounding villages (UNHCR 2002). With the establishment of the Karzai government, Charikar has experienced renewed growth and economic activity in the areas of construction, agriculture, and fabrication. According to the UNHCR, 90 per cent of district inhabitants earn livelihoods through subsistence and cash-crop agriculture, ten per cent are involved in business and 30 per cent do not earn any income (2002).

Charikar’s relatively low elevation of around 1,500 meters and temperate climate affords farmers two growing seasons per year from March through November. The area usually has an adequate water supply due to the Ghorband River which flows

---

<sup>4</sup> This information was gathered during conversations with village leaders in Charikar over the period of March 2002 through July 2005.

from the northern mountains and an intricate network of irrigation channels. Water levels are dependent on the amount of winter snows and the area experiences cyclical droughts when winter snows are below average. Complex irrigation systems have been constructed throughout the research area, although many of these have been damaged due to conflict and neglect. Charikar is known throughout the region as a place of comparative wealth and abundance due to the water supply and the fertile valley.

Nuclear or extended families practice intensive agriculture on small plots of land with the average farm size measuring approximately one hectare and supporting a wide variety of crops for family consumption and for sale (“Profile: Afghanistan” 2004). The most common crops in Charikar include wheat, corn, tomatoes, onions, eggplant, peppers, cucumbers and squash. Fruit trees, such as mulberries, apples, and apricots, often border vegetable fields and family compounds, providing an important source of nutrition and income. Grapes once played a very important economic role for Charikar families who sold raisins in Kabul and throughout Central and South Asia. However many of these vines were destroyed or damaged during the conflict and will not begin producing fruit again for several years. Surplus produce is sold in Kabul or the local Charikar market, the capital and largest city of Parwan Province.

Within each village is often a wide range of family situations and wealth groups. More wealthy landowners hire sharecroppers and/or labourers to work on their land, often because the landowner is pursuing off-farm employment. Sharecroppers and labourers work for cash or in-kind payment and might be landless, have a small amount of land or have relatively unproductive land.

#### *4.1.1 Why Charikar?*

Charikar was chosen as the research area for a variety of reasons, but most importantly, because from May to August 2004 and May to July 2005, I worked with farmers in Charikar District on an agricultural improvement project implemented by an international organization, Development Works Canada (DWC). DWC constructed a vegetable dehydration factory in Charikar city and worked with local farmers to provide raw vegetables for processing in the plant, while also providing assistance through seed and other material distributions and aiding farmers to improve vegetable quality and yields. I was most involved in a related project to organize female farmers to sun dry tomatoes that would then be cleaned, processed and packaged in the factory and sold to European markets. In all aspects of the programme, farmers were paid for their produce and also received profits from European sales of their products.

Additionally, Charikar District features several other attributes which made it appropriate for this research. While many parts of Afghanistan remain unstable and insecure, Charikar possesses relative security for national and international visitors. While there are some factions in the area who do not support the central government, in general, Charikar residents were always welcoming to me and I did not experience any significant security threats during my time there. The proximity to Kabul and to Bagram Air Base, the largest U.S. military base in the country, also ensured quick access to assistance or evacuation if necessary.

Charikar is well known throughout the country as an important centre of agricultural activity and a significant source for the produce sold in Kabul and in northern Afghan cities such as Mazar-i-Sharif. The prevalence of farming activities in

the area greatly facilitated my research and allowed me to visit a broad range of household and village types. Charikar offers relatively good transportation and accessibility to a variety of villages and households. While most secondary roads are rudimentary and impassable during certain times of the year, roads do exist, as opposed to many other areas of the country.

### *The Villages and Factory*

Research was undertaken in three villages surrounding Charikar city, as well as with employees of the vegetable dehydration factory. All villages are within a ten kilometer radius of Charikar city centre and are accessible by secondary or tertiary unpaved roads which are sometimes impassable during the winter months. Ethnic Tajiks make up almost 100 per cent of all of the villages in which research was conducted.<sup>5</sup>

These villages were chosen for a number of reasons including:

- Residents had agreed to participate in the sun-dried tomato programme.

This would ensure that I was known and welcomed and rendered safe in the community, and would give me additional opportunities to both interview participants and make observations as I would have reason to visit the villages frequently.<sup>6</sup>

- These villages represented important variations in the greater area, such as proximity to the city, wealth, and quality of agricultural land.

---

<sup>5</sup> As demographic data has not been collected for at least twenty five years, all information regarding the villages was gathered from village leaders and members.

<sup>6</sup> These assumptions did not always become reality. Please see Section 4.2.2, Research Challenges and Limitations for further discussion.

- As I conducted the first round of interviews during the winter of 2005, accessibility for many villages in the area was a challenge. At least parts of these three villages were usually accessible by car and on foot during the interview period.
- All of the research villages are very active in agriculture, yet have significant geographic differences which will be explored in detail later.

**Table 2: Summary of Research Areas**

	<b>Totomdara Sofla</b>	<b>Sadullah</b>	<b>Sadaqat</b>	<b>Factory</b>
<b>No. of households</b>	300	600	500	100 employees
<b>Location</b>	6 kms north of Charikar	10 kms northeast of Charikar	Directly adjacent to Charikar city	2 kms north of Charikar
<b>Economic Base</b>	Agriculture – vegetable production	Agriculture	Retail, manufacturing, agriculture	Vegetable dehydration facility

### **Totomdara Sofla**

The village of Totomdara Sofla is located approximately six kilometers north of the Charikar city centre and is directly east of the highway. The village is home to approximately 300 families (1,800 people)<sup>7</sup>. In general, the agricultural land in Totomdara Sofla is of high quality and the village is well known for its' vegetable production. There are several shops which house a very limited supply of general household and agricultural items. Villagers make trips to nearby Charikar for most

---

<sup>7</sup> Village leaders and members most frequently described the size of their villages by how many houses or compounds it contained. To estimate population numbers I used the Afghan government's assumption that the average household size is six people.

purchases. Totomdara Sofla is especially well known in the area for producing quality vegetables which are much sought after by Kabul merchants. Almost all of the residents of Totomdara Sofla participate in agriculture to at least some degree.

### **Sadullah**

The village of Sadullah is located approximately ten kilometers northeast of the Charikar city centre on a recently expanded and soon-to-be tarred road. The village is spread-out over a fairly wide area and is home to approximately 600 households (3,600 people), many of which cannot be reached by road. It contains several basic shops, but is otherwise made up of houses spread far apart and surrounded by agricultural lands. Almost all families in Sadullah participate in agriculture to some extent, although some family members may work in Charikar or even Kabul. There is no industry or other major forms of formal economic activity which take place within the village. Sadullah and Totomdara Sofla are adjacent to one another and connected by a very basic dirt track.

### **Sadaqat**

Of the three villages, Sadaqat, with approximately 500 households (3,000 people), is closest to Charikar City and could be considered peri-urban in nature. Sadaqat is split in two by the main north – south highway and is characterized by higher density housing on the west and large tracts of agricultural lands in the eastern portion. As opposed to the other two research villages, many inhabitants of Sadaqat are landless or do not rely on agriculture for their income. Those who do own land

sometimes do not live close to it and must travel up to several kilometers to access their land. The agriculture lands of Sadaqat are quite fertile and irrigation water is well supplied by a canal from the Ghorband River. The village is an important supplier of fresh vegetables to Charikar city and Kabul.

### **The Parwan Vegetable Dehydration Factory**

Located two kilometers north of Charikar City, the factory processes fresh vegetables from the Charikar area and sells the dehydrated products to European buyers. Fifty per cent of the 96 employees of the factory are women, most of whom are either widowed or have husbands who are disabled or unable to work. Most female factory workers come from landless families who live in Charikar city or the nearby villages, including Sadaqat. Unlike rural women living in the villages, the women factory workers are unique in that they are often the sole earners for their families.

#### **4.2 *The Research Approach***

A variety of qualitative data collection methods were used to conduct this research, including semi-structured individual and group interviews and participant observation. This triangulation of methods is designed to ensure that the findings are supported through multiple experiences. The interview methods were chosen because they allowed me to gain in-depth insight into the lives of a group of Afghan women. The experiences of each woman's life are so unique that the interview process was the best method to understand the similarities and differences which seem to exist. "Afghan women" are not a homogenized group, although often portrayed as such in the international media over the last few years. Other methods, such as surveys or

questionnaires, would not have allowed the rich detail and important life histories of these women to be uncovered.

Participant Observation was an important key to conducting this research, given that my work experiences in Afghanistan had illustrated that women's actions are often not accurately represented in conversation. It was essential to have had the experience of observing the activities of the women in these villages in addition to interviewing them in order to confirm interview responses.

#### 4.2.1 *The Research Process*

Research was conducted in a phased approach, parts of which took place both in Canada and Afghanistan. The following table details the research phases:

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
<b>Phase 1</b>	-Worked with NGOs in Afghanistan -Proposal development -Questionnaire development	Afghanistan Canada Canada	2002 – 2004 2003 – 2004 November 2004
<b>Phase 2</b>	-Questionnaire refined with help of research assistants -Participant Observation -Interviews and Focus Groups conducted	Afghanistan Afghanistan Afghanistan	December 2004 Jan/Feb 2005 Jan/Feb 2005
<b>Phase 3</b>	-Interview/FG responses coded and analyzed -Initial findings established -Developed follow-up questions	Afghanistan / Canada Afgh/Can Afgh/Can	March – May 2005 April – May 2005 May 2005
<b>Phase 4</b>	- Participant Observation -Shared preliminary findings with participants -Conducted follow up interviews / FGs	Afghanistan Afghanistan Afghanistan	June/July 2005 June/July 2005 June/July 2005
<b>Phase 5</b>	-Revised findings -Wrote thesis	Canada Canada	August-Oct 2005 Oct 2005- April 2007

### **Phase 1**

The process which has led to this research project occurred in several phases, the first of which was set in motion when I began working in Afghanistan in March 2002 on a programme to assist returning Afghans in rebuilding homes, schools and roads. This experience, and others which occurred through July 2005, allowed me to visit various parts of the country and to gain an interest and familiarity with the society. When it came time to choose a research topic, I knew that Afghanistan would play a part.

The sun-dried tomato project which I helped to implement gave me the opportunity to travel to 30 villages in the Charikar area, meet extensively with female and male farmers and observe agricultural practices in the fields and in homes. Not only did this experience lead me to the research question, it also allowed me to gain the trust of female farmers which was crucial for the research conducted specifically for this thesis. Without this trust, it would not have been possible to explore the roles of Afghan women in agriculture.

This work experience was crucial in helping me to identify the research topic, in addition to being the means to pursue it. My work in Charikar:

- Allowed me to identify the topic
- Gave me the opportunity to become familiar with the culture, language, geography and politics of the area
- Provided the background necessary to develop an appropriate questionnaire and methodology

- Allowed me to gain the trust of local leaders, farmers and most importantly, women participants

Quite simply, I feel certain that this research project would not have been possible without my work experience in the Charikar area. These experiences led to the development of the research proposal, including the objectives and approach, which were then refined over a period of time both in Afghanistan with input from Afghan and international acquaintances familiar with Afghanistan, and in Canada with my thesis supervisors. Before going to Afghanistan, I created a questionnaire for interviews and focus groups (this initial questionnaire can be found in Appendix A).

## **Phase 2**

Phase Two of the research involved in-depth individual and group interviews and participant observation. The initial round of interviews was conducted in women's homes in January and February of 2005 with the help of two female Afghan research assistants. It was essential that the assistants be women as access to female participants would have been very limited otherwise.

Zabeda<sup>8</sup>, a pharmacist from Charikar who works as the manager of the sun-dried tomato project with Development Works, assisted in refining the interview questions to make them simpler and more culturally appropriate (the revised questionnaire can be found in Appendix B). She was an important part of the research team as she is well known and well respected in the area. Although I had had previous contact with many of the families that I interviewed and was a familiar figure in the community, I feel sure that Zabeda's presence legitimized our activities for many of the

---

<sup>8</sup> Many Afghans are known only by one name.

interviewees and made them feel more comfortable in sharing their experiences with us. While her English is quite limited, she was often vital at placing questions and responses into context and mediating the cultural differences between me as the researcher and the interviewees. As manager of the sun dried tomato project, Zabeda held a powerful position within the community which may have resulted in some power dynamics between her and the research participants. It is not possible to determine to what extent this may have impacted women's willingness to participate or the way they responded in the interview process.

The second research assistant, Deeba, was a young woman from Kabul with good English skills who translated all of the interviews from Dari for the research. Although Deeba's English is quite good, she has spent most of her life in Pakistan and was not always familiar with the phrasing used in the Charikar area, or with the cultural implications of what the interviewees were trying to explain. For this reason, it was even more valuable to have Zabeda assist in the interviews.

The traditional approach of scheduling interviews in advance was not practical for this research. Travel in winter is difficult and simply getting to villages can be problematic. Given we had met most of these women previously, we simply arrived in a village and randomly chose doors to knock on. Twenty-five individual and group in-depth interviews were conducted with women ranging in age from 18 to 65 over the January 2005 to July 2005 period. Women from a range of situations were interviewed to gain a broad perspective on the possibilities of an Afghan woman's life. Important variables included age, marital status, wealth, family make-up and location.

<b>Village</b>	<b>Interview Number</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>
western Sadaqat	1	40	married
western Sadaqat	19	40	widow
western Sadaqat	20	40	widow
western Sadaqat	20	30	widow
western Sadaqat	20	40	married
western Sadaqat	20	33	married
western Sadaqat	20	40	disabled husband
eastern Sadaqat	2	around 50	widow
eastern Sadaqat	14	25	married
eastern Sadaqat	15	30	married
eastern Sadaqat	16	20	married
eastern Sadaqat	17	20	married
eastern Sadaqat	21	35	married
Factory	3	38	widow / married
Factory	7	47	widow
Factory	18	40	disabled husband
Factory	22	35	widow
Factory	23	45	disabled husband
Sadullah	4	35	married
Sadullah	5	22	married
Sadullah	6	28	married
Sadullah	13	around 20	married
Sadullah	24	50	widow
Sadullah	25	31	married
Totomdara Sofla	8	40	married
Totomdara Sofla	9	23	married
Totomdara Sofla	9	25	married
Totomdara Sofla	10	50	widow
Totomdara Sofla	11	50	married
Totomdara Sofla	11	23	married
Totomdara Sofla	12	18	unmarried

In most cases, we would first speak with the leader of the village to explain our purpose in visiting the village and ask for permission to enter. This is considered the polite way to enter a village if you are a stranger and helped to avoid future problems. Receiving permission to enter the villages was not a problem during the first round of interviews and village leaders would sometimes escort us to the first house to introduce

us to the family if we did not know them. We would choose subsequent houses randomly, without interference from the village leaders.

When we arrived at a home we would introduce ourselves and explain our purpose for visiting. Often, the family already knew either myself or Zabeda and would immediately welcome us. Most people knew us from the context of the sun-dried tomato project, and hence we would explain that our visit had nothing to do with this project and was for a completely separate purpose. A few women were in the middle of baking bread or preparing lunch and asked us to return another time, but no one declined to speak with us.

In most cases, interviews were conducted with all of the adult women in the household, either separately or in a group setting. As most Afghan families heat only one room during the winter months, it was sometimes difficult to ask to interview someone privately and force either the participant or the rest of the family into a cold room. If there was more than one woman present, we would complete individual interviews with each person and ask that the others allow only that individual to respond. The interviews were semi-structured in nature, in that I asked the same list of questions of each woman, but would often ask follow up questions pertinent to each individual. The semi-structured approach was partially chosen so that interviews would feel more like a conversation to the women and help them feel more at ease.

The way that participants responded to interviews generally fell into two categories. Most of these women lead very sheltered lives and are not used to anyone expressing very much interest in their thoughts. This fact seemed to cause women to react in different ways. Some welcomed the opportunity to share their experiences and

have the chance to express how difficult or challenging their lives have been. Other women however did not seem to know how to respond to the interest in their lives, unsure of why someone would want to know about these details and answered the questions more succinctly.

The research assistant would translate the responses for me and I took detailed notes during the interview process. I also recorded the interviews so that I could go back to them at a later time. I would also note my impressions of how the interviewee was reacting to the questions and observed details about the family and living situation. For instance, I found that one could augment the information gained from the interview regarding the economic situation of the family based on the state of their home and the types of possessions they owned.

### **Phase 3**

Phase Three of the research process was to analyze the first round of interviews. I again listened to the interviews and transcribed them in more detail than my original notes had allowed. This was a valuable process, as I found that there were important points that I missed in my initial notes when there were often so many people speaking at once.

Next, I identified recurring themes in the transcripts and began to code them. To understand each theme more comprehensively, I grouped responses according to theme, keeping references for the interviewee. This process was a first step in deriving patterns and themes from the interviews, but it certainly was not the entire picture. It became clear from the interview process that responses about the role and participation in agricultural activities was integrated into the context of their lives and it was critical

that their responses to the questions in the semi-structured interviews be framed and interpreted in this broader context. This process took some time and continued throughout the thesis writing process. However, I was able to make some initial observations from the first round of interviews. (See Appendix C for a summary of initial findings).

#### **Phase 4**

In June and July of 2005 I was again living and working in Charikar and had the opportunity to re-visit the women I had interviewed, to share the preliminary observations with them, receive their feedback and to ask follow-up questions which arose from the transcripts. There were parts of two of the research villages to which I was not able to return because of tensions between village leaders and the sun dried tomato project (please see explanation in *Limitations and Challenges Section*).

The women were eager to hear the results of the first round of interviews and were very vocal in expressing their thoughts on the subject. The observations were deemed to be accurate by them, and the follow-up interviews provided deeper, more nuanced information. During this period, I analyzed the material from both rounds of interviews, finalizing the research observations. (See Appendix D: Follow-up Questions).

#### **Participant Observation**

In the six months that I was living and working in Charikar, I had ample opportunity to observe the practices of women and men in the area of agriculture, making participant observation and watching ongoing activity as I worked and conducted research. During most of this time, I was making frequent visits to the

research villages, houses and farms and speaking with both men and women about their agricultural activities. The participant observation aspect of this research involved spending time at the houses and farms of research participants, observing the activities of the various household members and making notes about these activities. Visits were made at various times of day and throughout the summer months. These notes were later compared with information gathered from interviews, and in combination were used to draw conclusions about the roles of women in agriculture. This was an invaluable aspect of the research as it confirmed and deepened the information that I learned in the interviews, especially regarding the differing practices between villages, age groups and wealth groups.

### **Phase 5**

The last phase of the research process involved finalizing the research findings and writing this thesis. (See Appendix E for a summary of the findings).

#### *4.2.2 Research Challenges and Implications*

**Access to Houses and Weather Conditions.** The first round of interviews was completed during the winter months of January and February 2005 during the heaviest season of snowfall that Afghanistan has experienced in many years. This timeframe limited the villages that were accessible by car and by foot due to snow, rain and mud. These three villages were chosen partially based on their accessibility during the winter months and the relative good condition of their roads and footpaths. Additionally, we were often restricted to visiting houses that were close to the main road or that had well cleared paths leading to them. Although we did visit at least several houses that were up to one kilometer walk from the road, this limitation could have important

implications for the research. It is possible that women's roles differ within villages based on the general accessibility and distance from main thoroughfares to their house and agricultural lands. I was unable to explore this in great detail however because of the weather conditions.

**Security.** As previously mentioned, there were tensions between the Factory and two of the village leaders, which limited my access to return to parts of these villages for follow-up interviews and to share research results. In one part of Sadaqat, the DWC Factory had constructed a vegetable collection centre with the approval and cooperation of the village. About a year after this was constructed, a brother of the man who donated the land for the construction, arrived in the village and claimed that he also owned the land and he was going to take over the collection center. After receiving threats and being unable to resolve the issue between the two parties, the Factory asked the local government to become involved and mediate the problem. I did not feel comfortable going back to this area of the village while this problem was ongoing, as I was recognized as a Development Works employee by most of the village members.

The second instance occurred in Totomdara Sofla where the village leader insisted on receiving compensation for allowing his village to participate in the vegetable dehydration programme. The organisation's policy is that farmers decide on an individual basis to participate in the programme and that all payments go directly to the farmer. This policy resulted in the village leader not granting us access to the community for a second round of interviews and follow up discussions. Clearly, disobeying the village leader could have put the research team at risk.

**Language and Translation.** All interviews were conducted in Dari, a dialect of Farsi, through the assistance of a translator, although my basic knowledge of the language gave me some idea of what was being discussed. It is inevitable that to varying degrees, most translated discussions lose some of the nuances and meanings. It also tends to constrict the flow of the conversation and may be intimidating to some participants. This likely had an impact on the information gathered.

Additionally, finding a competent female translator who was willing and able to travel outside of Kabul is an incredible challenge. In the rural areas of Afghanistan, few women are literate and almost none have any English skills, which presents several challenges. The translator must be a woman as men outside of the immediate family are not allowed to see or speak with women. I had to find a translator from Kabul and bring her to Charikar. The fact that she was from a different ethnic group and not from the Charikar area caused some distrust among some of the families we visited. This made it especially valuable to have Zabeda accompany us as a woman who is well-known and well-trusted from Charikar; she was able to reassure the women that we were trustworthy people with whom to speak.

Because it was so difficult to find a female translator willing to travel outside of Kabul, I could not be too particular about who assisted me. The translator had very good English skills compared to many people I met in Afghanistan. However, she was quite young, around eighteen years old, and very inexperienced at translation. She worked as a translator with me on the sun dried tomato project which gave her several months of experience before we began the interviews.

**The International Aid Factor.** Immediately following the fall of the Taliban in the winter of 2001, a flood of international organizations arrived in Afghanistan to begin humanitarian and reconstruction activities. As Charikar is quite close to Kabul, relatively secure and easily accessible, many national and international agencies traveled to Charikar to set up new development programmes.

One result is that some villages became so used to being visited by national and international aid workers who asked them a lot of questions and sometimes promised them things which never materialized. For some community members, this caused a distrust of strangers and fatigue with what seemed like endless questions which never led to any substantial changes in their lives. This could lead some to either refuse to speak with international visitors or to not respond honestly to questions. I feel confident that this was largely avoided in the case of my research by the fact that I was already known and trusted in these villages. This was in part due to the fact that I was a representative of Development Works, an organization which had already proven to these farmers that it would deliver on promises and discussions with community members. I think this gave me credibility, even though I made it clear that these interviews were not directly related to the Parwan Dehydrates Programme's work in the community.

This relationship also poses a possible problem, however, in that I could have been perceived as someone who had the potential to assist participants. Even though I tried to explain clearly that the purpose of the interviews was to gain greater understanding of the roles of women in agriculture and that there would not be any financial benefit or other form of direct assistance because of participating in the

research, there are no guarantees that I was completely able to change these perceptions. There is the possibility that some participants may have tried to make their situation sound even more dire than it actually was in hopes of receiving some assistance.

**Privacy during Interviews.** As noted, it was not always possible to conduct interviews with individual women in private. This would be true at all times as privacy and individuality are very different concepts in Afghanistan than in Canada, and accentuated during the winter months when only one room was heated and in use by the household. The largest problems arose when the men of the household decided to stay for the conversation, even though we tried to politely request that we speak only with the women. In most of these cases, the women would then give very short replies to the questions or allow the men to answer for them.

When there was more than one adult woman in the household, I would usually interview them as a group and then follow up with individual interviews. These usually took place in the presence of the other women of the household which may have had some impact in the way that some women responded. The Afghan household is a very hierarchical structure, with men at the top, then the oldest woman of the house, and then younger women and finally children in place of power and authority.

The relationships between the women of the household are often quite complex, especially between mothers and daughters-in-law. The older woman controls the way that the younger women spend their time, including the assignment of chores, where they may go and even how freely they may speak their opinions. Older women whom I interviewed generally spoke quite freely in front of the other women, the

younger women sometimes seemed more reluctant. In those situations I did not want to push and potentially cause problems within the household. Unfortunately, it would not have been appropriate to request to speak with them separately.

## **5 The Contribution of Rural Women to Agriculture and Household Livelihoods**

The research revealed that women are indeed important contributors to household livelihoods in rural Charikar, yet common gender values do not accurately reflect the day-to-day realities. In most of Charikar, women play a dynamic role in agriculture that changes with their circumstances and external factors. Despite the important contribution women make to family livelihoods, their level of control and decision making is often quite limited.

### ***5.1 Afghan Values often Differ from Actual Roles of Women in Agriculture***

In all of the research areas, women were valuable contributors to household agricultural production, to a much greater extent than initial conversations with female and male farmers disclosed. It is clear that the local societal values regarding appropriate behaviour for women do not always equal the way that households function in reality. Agricultural activity varied widely based on family situations, the age and marital status of the women and the location, but in all cases, women were wholly or partially responsible for some aspects of agriculture.

<b>Table 5: Women's Roles in Agriculture</b>		
<b>Finding</b>	<b>Human Capital</b>	<b>Social Capital</b>
Women are important contributors to household livelihoods	Women provide essential human capital to households	In spite of their participation in agriculture, women are often excluded from social networks which tend to be utilized almost exclusively by men.
Women in eastern Sadaqat do not participate in field work and are generally less involved than women in other areas	Women indicate that upholding family honour is more important than the human capital which women provide. Also, inexpensive hired labour is available in nearby Charikar centre. Apparently, families possess the financial capital necessary to hire needed human capital for agriculture.	N/A
Women often describe their works as "helping the men" yet they are often entirely responsible for some agricultural activities such as livestock management, dairy production and vegetable sorting	The human capital which women provide in these areas is essential and certainly equals that of the men, yet it is not valued in the same way.	Although social capital in support of agricultural activities exists for men, comparable social networks which support women-led activities are not as common.

Women often discount their valuable role by perceiving themselves as helpers to the male members of the household who are accepted as the "real" farmers; yet, it is clear that the human capital provided by rural women is an essential input to household livelihoods. The interview process and my work experiences in the research area revealed that both men and women view women's participation as supplementary to men's agricultural activity. Women often referred to their agricultural work as "helping the men," indicating that their activities were not independent but were

subordinate and tied to the activities of the men, who are seen as the true farmers.

Women do not perceive themselves as farmers, but see themselves as farmers' wives or daughters, who frequently help the men of the household in agricultural pursuits. As a 50 year-old widow from Sadullah stated:

*I do all of the work with the men. If they are planting, I am standing there with the seeds next to them.*

In contrast, several participants indicated that they tend to be wholly responsible for some aspects of cultivation, particularly weeding and collecting seeds for use in the next season. This assertion was supported by my observations in the research area, where I would often watch individual or groups of women weeding the vegetables in their fields without the assistance of male relatives (un-related men would not have any access to these women).

### *5.1.1 The Agricultural Activities of Rural Women*

Interviews and observations established the critical importance of women in agriculture in Charikar, particularly regarding their participation in field work (with the exception of the village of Eastern Sadaqat, an important difference that will be explored later).

Generally, the entire household participates in agricultural activities, including women. As one participant in Totomdara Sofla pointed out, "if you came in the summer, you wouldn't find anyone at home because we would all be working in the fields." Women are involved in most aspects of cultivation including planting, seed collection, watering, weeding, and harvesting. Women frequently stated that they

participated in the lighter work of agriculture, whereas men usually undertook heavier aspects, such as plowing and building and maintaining irrigation structures.

There was universal agreement by research participants that all agricultural activities which take place within the house or compound are the sole responsibility of women. This encompasses an extensive list including:

- Sorting the vegetables for home use from those which will be sold in the market
- Cleaning, storing and packaging all produce and seeds
- Sun drying vegetables for home use, especially tomatoes, chilies, spinach, coriander and onions
- Grinding herbs and vegetables into powder for cooking and sometimes for sale
- In some cases, planting and maintaining small gardens within the compound
- Separating wheat and chaff, in some cases grinding wheat for flour
- Tending livestock, which might include chickens, turkeys, donkeys, cows, goats, sheep
- Assisting in the birth of animals and care of the young
- Milking animals
- Making dairy products including butter, cheese, yogurt, milk and crut<sup>9</sup>
- Collecting and drying fruits grown within the compound

---

<sup>9</sup> Crut is a type of yogurt which is dried until it is a hard ball and is the consistency of chalk. It can be stored for a long time and then added to water to create yogurt.

While most farmers focus on crop cultivation, some promote domestic food security or supplement earnings by raising livestock. These animals – sheep, chickens or goats – are usually kept within the mud-walled compound of home farmsteads. In contrast to their subordinate role in crop cultivation, women are assigned the prime responsibility for livestock management though they are generally supported by their male relatives. In some cases, children may take animals outside to graze during the day or will bring grass or hay for the livestock into the compound.

### 5.1.2 *The Limited Role of Women in Eastern Sadaqat*

Unlike most rural communities in Charikar, women in the area of Eastern Sadaqat generally do not engage in farm work in the fields. This reflects their markedly different view on gender roles compared to other communities. The peri-urban village is directly adjacent to the urban centre of Charikar which may play a large role in this anomaly. The main highway separates the village into eastern and western sections, with all of the agricultural lands located on the eastern side along with approximately 100 compounds and the western section containing an additional 400 houses.

Evidence from interviews and participant observation indicates that women in eastern Sadaqat rarely venture outside of the family compound to their own fields, much less go out to the greater community. Several women in this area were not even aware of how much land their husbands owned or rented. Research collaborators provided several reasons for this custom, including:

- Family honour
- It is not the culture of the village to work outside of the compound

- They can not do the work (i.e. it is too difficult for them)
- They must stay home to watch the children

This custom seems to apply only to those women who live in the eastern section of Sadaqat. All of the women interviewed in western Sadaqat were landless, although participants indicated that some families live in western Sadaqat but own land in eastern Sadaqat.

The issue of family honour and village custom was the most common response supporting these additional restrictions on women's activities and seemed to be well accepted and known within the village of Sadaqat and surrounding areas. If the women of this village work in the fields, their families are disgraced and lose status within the community:

*In Sadaqat, mostly women don't work in the fields.*

*People say bad things about the family if the women work in the fields. Even our husbands will not let us go to the canal to get water. We just go to funerals, weddings, to visit our fathers' houses, and sometimes to Charikar market. Old ladies can go to the fields to bring vegetables for cooking but young women cannot or women will talk. – a 30 year-old married woman*

*Some women don't work in the fields because they don't have permission. In the summer, my husband doesn't*

*allow me even to go out to the fields to get fresh vegetables to eat; he says he will bring them to me. Some people without money, the women have to work in the fields, but this brings dishonour to the family. But in our family, even if we didn't have money, I would not work in the fields because of family honour. – a 35 year-old married woman*

In other ways, the roles of women in Sadaqat were the same as those in the other research villages. As in the greater Charikar area, women are responsible for all agricultural work which takes place within the compound or house. Widows here also experience the responsibilities and freedoms of the head of the household.

Although many participants indicated that women from wealthier households did not work outside of the home, including in the fields, eastern Sadaqat was the only place where this was evident. It is clear that Afghan custom would ideally keep most women inside the home for the sake of family honour; however in all of the research villages except for parts of Sadaqat, this is not perceived as possible in order to earn adequate household livelihood.

In eastern Sadaqat, it appears that several factors converge to create the circumstances which allow these families to more strictly adhere to traditional Afghan customs regarding gender roles in agriculture. Sadaqat is close to the urban centre of Charikar where there is an abundance of unemployed men who are available as short-term, inexpensive labourers. In addition, it appears that farmers in eastern Sadaqat have the financial capital to hire outside labour; therefore they do not require the human

capital of the women of the household for field work. It is unclear however why the people of Sadaqat choose to hire labourers. Many of the families interviewed there did not seem to be wealthier than those in the other villages, although it is difficult to ascertain real income levels. Access to inexpensive labour and adequate financial capital allows these families to practice traditional gender roles.

One can look at the potential vulnerability of these families in several ways. In times of peace and prosperity, they may be less vulnerable because they have the financial capital to hire sufficient labour to pursue livelihood strategies without compromising their culture. However, it is unclear if they were more vulnerable during times of conflict as they must have had less financial capital to hire labour, yet according to the interviewees, the women still do not work in the fields or otherwise change their roles as occurred in other villages. It is not possible to draw conclusions for certain from this research, as it has been established that the way that people describe their actions does not always equal reality.

## ***5.2 Women's Role in Agriculture is Dynamic***

The roles that a woman plays in agriculture change throughout a woman's life and with evolving sociopolitical circumstances. Afghan custom determines the participation of women in agriculture and in the household dynamic. This participation is dynamic and depends on the household structure, a woman's age and marital status, poverty and shocks such as conflict and drought. A strict hierarchy exists in most rural Afghan households, with the eldest male as the head of the household and main decision maker. The roles of women and men tend to be quite segregated, with clear divisions between what is considered to be "man's" work and what is "woman's" work.

The matriarch of the family generally controls the activities and movements of the other women within the household. A woman's life is ultimately determined by strong traditions which seem to be resistant to long-lasting change.

<b>Table 6: Women's Roles are Dynamic</b>		
<b>Finding</b>	<b>Human Capital</b>	<b>Social Capital</b>
Newly married women often do not work in the fields for the first few years of marriage	This tradition is not adhered to in cases where families are small or impoverished and therefore require the human capital. This practice has implications for how the human capital of the other women of the household is used.	N/A
Women are solely responsible for all agricultural activities which take place within the house or compound	The human capital which women provide in this case is necessary for household agricultural pursuits.	N/A
Widows in urban and peri-urban Charikar face unique livelihood challenges	The only human capital available to a female-headed household is often that of the widow. The quality of her human capital is generally limited due to illiteracy and lack of education. Urban areas may offer a greater variety of livelihood strategies.	Widows in urban areas have often migrated from rural areas and therefore may not be connected to social networks which could provide support. A positive aspect may be greater freedom to pursue non-traditional livelihoods such as factory work.
Widows in rural areas have inherited their husbands' land and continue to farm	Many widows expressed frustration that they did not possess the knowledge or ability to manage farming on their own as they had not gained these skills when their husbands were alive. Some widows turn to sharecropping as their households do not contain adequate human capital to farm.	Rural widows seem to be able to draw upon existing social networks in their communities, including agricultural cooperatives.
Some households adopted flexible gender roles as a coping strategy during conflict	The human capital available to households frequently shifted as men were unable to farm because they were away fighting or their safety was threatened. Women sometimes took on different and/or more responsibilities.	Social networks assisted women in taking on more responsibilities during periods of conflict.

### 5.2.1 *The Traditional Roles*

When an Afghan woman marries, she moves to her husband's household, usually living with his parents and other family members. Her status and role within this new household often changes dramatically from life at her father's house. In all of the research villages it is common for newly married women not to work outside of the compound for the first one to three years of their marriage. A participant from Totomdara Sofla stated:

*In my father's house I worked in the fields, but in my husband's house I haven't yet. Since I was married three years ago I haven't worked in the fields because I'm newly married. My husband loves me too much so I don't work in the fields. Before, my mother in law was living with us and she did work in the fields. Now that she has moved away I'll have to work outside this year. At first I didn't know about this area and I was newly married so I didn't work outside. – a 22 year-old married woman*

Of the three young and newly married women interviewed outside of eastern Sadaqat, the respondent was the only one who indicated she was still not doing agricultural work in the fields. Women in all of the villages confirmed that this was a common practice and that many of them had not worked for several years after they were married.

That newly married women often do not work outside of the compound for several years has implications for the human capital available to the household, the

activities of the other women in the household and the livelihood security of the family. While the newly married are restricted to the compound, they often focus on housework, child care and agricultural activities which take place within the home such as animal care, food processing and vegetable drying. In a larger household with several women, this frees the older women to take a greater part in outside agricultural activities along with or sometimes in place of the men of the household. However, in small households, livelihoods can be endangered if this tradition is followed. There is some evidence that smaller families allow newly married women to participate in field work out of necessity. A young, married woman in Sadullah explained that her mother-in-law had been living with them for the first two years of their marriage and helped her husband with the field work. Recently the mother-in-law had moved away so she was now working in the fields with her husband. She expressed concern that the family would experience greater poverty without her mother-in-law's labour on the farm.

After this newlywed period, an Afghan woman's life seems to be focused on raising children and participating in agricultural activities for the household livelihood. Aside from Sadaqat, women spend substantial time working in the fields with the rest of the family, while still responsible for completing all of the housework and raising the children.

*I only know how to work in the fields. In the morning I do all of the housework until about 1:00 pm and I go to the fields until evening and then I come back to do more housework until bed time. In my father's house I was like*

*a small flower, I was happy, smiling. When I married I came into difficulties. There were a lot of bad times. I had to do a lot more work. – a 31 year-old from Sadullah*

*Young ladies do more work in the house but it depends a lot on the family situation. Younger women usually do tailoring, baking and sometimes when they are finished they go to work in the fields. For example, she might cook and clean until 10:00 am, then go to work in the fields, return to the house at noon to make lunch and then go back to the fields in the afternoon. – Western Sadaqat group interview*

### 5.2.2 *Widowhood and Female Heads of Households*

Some of the most dramatic changes in an Afghan woman's life occur with widowhood, a state that brings greater freedom, but also significant responsibility and care. Widows often become the head of the household and take on the role that is commonly filled by men. While many widows seem to relish this new-found freedom and power, they also express wistfulness for the time when their husbands took care of everything for them.

#### *Widows in Urban and Peri-Urban Charikar*

Landless widows and those with disabled or infirm husbands are far more likely to seek employment outside of the home. This occurrence is greatest in the groups interviewed in peri-urban western Sadaqat and at Development Works' Vegetable

Dehydration Factory, where women have few livelihoods options without agricultural lands. In a group interview conducted in western Sadaqat involving five women, two were widows, two were married to men who were unable to work and one was married to a man who was still working and owned land in a distant village. None of the women were currently working outside of the home, although they were all looking for appropriate employment. Several indicated that they had rented land when their husbands were alive or able to work and worked in the fields with them. However they no longer rented land as they did not make enough working by themselves to be able to afford it. They also stated that they were willing to work on other people's land, saying, "We are widows, we will work." This is something that most married women would not think of doing as there is a perception that it brings great dishonour to the family. One interviewee has held several jobs in the Charikar area, including cleaning raisins in a factory and making shoes in a project started by the Afghan Ministry of Women's Affairs.

All of the women working at the vegetable dehydration factory were either widowed or had husbands who could not work because of a disability or advanced age. They were also landless and lived in Charikar city. One widow's husband owned land near Charikar and when he was alive she helped him to farm it. She sold the land when her husband died and began working outside for the first time in her life. Similarly, a second widow did not do any work outside of the home before her husband's death:

*When my husband was alive, I didn't have permission to work outside at all. My husband's brother wanted to take me to Kunduz (northern Afghanistan) but my mother*

*needed someone to take care of her in Charikar so I stayed and worked. I used to work in other people's houses, doing laundry, and I made blankets at home. When the factory was built we were very happy; now we are grateful to have work. – a 35 year-old from Charikar*

Another woman factory worker, whose husband is disabled, moved to Charikar 12 years ago so that they could find work. They owned a house in their village of Jabul Surraj (approximately 15 kilometers north of Charikar) but no land. As a woman from a landless family, she indicated that she had worked in other people's land and houses even before her husband was sick.

For urban and peri-urban women heads of households, human capital, financial capital and natural capital are limiting factors when choosing livelihood strategies. Even those who do own land often do not have the human capital within the household to farm or the financial capital to hire labour. Share cropping is an option which several of the rural widows have chosen, but some women seem to feel uncomfortable with this responsibility and choose to sell their land. Perhaps most importantly, living close to Charikar provides a variety of employment options, although many are not well-paid.

Culture is not as great an inhibiting factor for these women when considering livelihood options. Single women, raising children on their own, are less concerned with upholding family honour and more concerned with survival. Although gender roles are more relaxed, there are still a limited number of jobs deemed suitable for

women, with most working as household labour or in factories. Social capital may also be more limited for widows in peri-urban areas, especially for those who have moved from rural villages. Living in a new area, they often have no extended family or social networks upon which they can rely in times of extreme need.

### *Rural Widows*

The three widows interviewed in more rural areas inherited their husbands' land and opted to stay in their villages to continue farming. A widow from eastern Sadaqat inherited one acre of land from her husband and plants mostly wheat and vegetables. She has three children who still live with her and help her with agricultural activities. When her husband was alive she did not work in the fields at all, but she asserted that now that she is older and a widow it is not dishonourable for her to work outside. One widow interviewed in Sadaqat worked on her one acre of land with two grown and married sons, often making the final decisions regarding agriculture.

*I inherited land from my husband. When he was alive I didn't work in the fields at all. He wouldn't let me open my mouth. If we had guests I had to knock on the door and leave the tea outside for him to bring in – I wasn't allowed even to see outsiders. – age unknown, estimate over 50 years old<sup>10</sup>*

She now has all of the decision making responsibility for the family's agricultural work, commenting:

---

<sup>10</sup> Due to widespread illiteracy and the lack of national records such as birth certificates, many Afghans do not know their ages.

*To decide what to plant each year, I don't look at the market prices; I just plant what the neighbors are planting. The village leader gave me some wheat seeds this year and told me that I would earn more money with this wheat so I planted it.*

Another young woman who was interviewed indicated that her widowed mother-in-law, whose son was disabled, “worked like a man,” despite the fact that they hired three to five people to work in their fields. She also considered her mother-in-law the head of the household and said that she was responsible for making all of the decisions for the household.

A widow from Totomdara Sofla lost her husband during the fighting with the Russians and raised her seven young children on her own:

*When I became a widow I had just one cow, one acre and no family to help us. I was planting a little bit by myself but just for eating, not for selling. We stayed here during the war and planted a little – God was helping us. Then my oldest daughter was married and my son-in-law helped with the farming.*

Now that her four sons are adults, they have inherited a half of a jerib (approximately 0.1 hectares) each and are responsible for farming activities, although all family members participate. They also rent fields and give two-thirds of their profits to the landowner. She and her two daughters-in-law agreed that when it came to decisions regarding planting:

*We look at what will sell in the market and then we all discuss what we should plant. This year we decided to plant tomatoes and onions.*

One participant was a widow in Sadullah who inherited five acres of land when her husband died. She now lives with her husband's second wife, who is younger and does most of the housework.

*I earn money from the land. I rent the land to my brother-in-law because there was no one to help. He sells the produce in the market and gives me half of the profits. My brother-in-law decides what to plant, but sometimes I help him in the fields. I used to work with my husband in the fields - if you are the wife of a farmer, you must work in the fields. In my father's house, he was just bringing us food and I was eating it. Now I do all of the work for myself, for the children. When it snows, I have to clear the snow from the roof. I do all of the shopping now. It is difficult doing all of the men's work and all of the women's work by yourself.*

Most widows in Afghanistan do not remarry because of social custom and because of the risk of losing their children. If a widow marries someone outside of her deceased husband's family, his family will often take the children from the woman. Children are seen to be the property of the husband and his family and it is not

acceptable for them to be raised by another man. One widow's experience illustrates this situation:

*My husband's family told me to marry someone else, but I said no because of the children. So I had to start working in other people's houses, to bring food for my children. Now, because I have had a very bad time, I have forgotten that I'm a woman. I feel as if I'm a man, so I don't want to remarry. My husband really loved me and whatever I said he would do for me so I was very happy for eight years. He was a very good man. Now I don't want anything, just to take care of my children. My heart has broken. – a 35 year-old from Charikar*

#### *Widows and Land Tenure*

In Afghanistan, land is owned by the male head of household and is passed down from father to sons. Occasionally, daughters will also inherit land from their fathers, but this seems to be the exception rather than the rule. Only one interviewee said she had inherited land and a house from her father. She explained that this was because her father had extensive land holdings and several houses; therefore there was plenty to be spread between herself and her brothers. However, even when a woman inherits land from her family, it is considered to be owned by her husband when she marries.

Although Afghan and Sharia law are designed to protect the landholdings of widows, the practically defunct legal system means that those laws can easily be ignored by those who wish to take advantage. According to Afghan law, which is based on Islamic law, if a widow has sons, she should inherit her husband's land in trust for her sons. If she does not have any children at the time of her husband's death, she should inherit one quarter of the land, and the rest will go to her husband's family. Of the seven widows who were interviewed, three living in the villages had inherited their husbands' land and continued to farm after his death. Often they worked with their sons or other male relatives to cultivate this land.

Four of the widows who were interviewed lived in western Sadaqat or in other parts of Charikar city and were landless for a variety of reasons. Two women who were working in the Factory stated that their families never owned land so their husbands always had other jobs or rented land on which to farm. None of the widows interviewed continued to rent land after their husbands died although the reasons for this are unclear. One widow, who lived in a village near to Charikar when her husband was alive, indicated that she inherited her husband's land but decided to sell it as she did not feel that she was capable of working on it by herself. She now lives in Charikar and works in the factory.

One widow in western Sadaqat indicated that she did not inherit her husband's land, even though she has young sons who should have farmed it one day. She blames her brother-in-law for taking the land and refusing to take care of her and her family as Afghan custom dictates. Now, her young sons must work to support the family, two

working at bakeries earning between 25 and 50 Canadian cents per day plus five pieces of naan<sup>11</sup> each. She describes the troubles she has had with her husband's family:

*My brother-in-law lives next door but he doesn't help us. When I was working all day I thought they would help feed the children, but I'd come home at the end of the day and the children hadn't been fed. We were from Bagram (district adjacent to Charikar) and after my husband died I moved to Charikar because I thought my brother-in-law would help us. He didn't give us any of the land that belonged to my husband. He finally gave me this little bit of land here and I built the house. My brother-in-law has water but he doesn't give us any; we have to walk very far to carry it to the house.*

Rural widows with land experience a different set of challenges and opportunities. Although they have the natural capital and access to resources, they sometimes do not possess the education or experience necessary to farm as successfully as their husbands did.

Human capital can be described as a function of both the quantity and quality of labour available to a household to pursue livelihood. The quality of labour provided by rural Afghan women is limited by illiteracy, lack of education and training. Widows have often not gained the necessary skills to manage a farm independently, decide what

---

<sup>11</sup> Naan, a type of flat bread, is a staple food for Afghans.

to produce and where and how to sell produce on the market. The cultural tradition which limits the education of girls leads to weakened human capital for widows. As is true all around the world, educated men and women generally earn better livelihoods.

Additionally, it is more difficult for women to procure seeds and other agricultural inputs and to access markets. Female-headed households are more likely to experience difficulty accessing resources, especially land inherited by late husbands. Furthermore, the prohibition against remarrying outside of the husband's family or risking losing one's children eliminates a possible source of security.

Widows who remain in their home villages may have greater access to social capital through existing social networks and community ties. Though, these same networks could also restrict their ability to break out of traditional gender roles thereby limiting their livelihood strategies.

### 5.2.3 *The Strength of Tradition*

#### *The Years of Conflict*

During the more than twenty years of conflict, the roles that women played within the household often changed by necessity. All of the interviewees described this time as one of deprivation, desperation and overwhelming need. Many families did not do any planting because it was too dangerous to be out working in the fields, there was not adequate water or there was no market for their produce. Households adopted survival strategies, selling assets to buy minimal amounts of food and necessities and short-term migration. Families with money and resources left the Charikar area during the periods of fighting and stayed with family in Kabul, Pakistan or Panjshir. Those without connections or money stayed behind and survived however they could.

Participants indicated that especially during the Taliban period, their families adopted flexible gender roles as a coping strategy, with women assuming responsibility for more and/or different agricultural tasks than usual. Many also took on other, traditionally male roles, such as doing the shopping and taking care of agricultural business in the markets. Participants made the following comments about the period of conflict:

*We stayed during the fighting. Our home was destroyed but now we've rebuilt it. We planted during that time but there was little water so there wasn't much food or money. The Taliban diverted the water so we got only a little each week. We dug a pond to collect the water and used it for the house. It was very dirty so we would boil it and drink it but it still made us sick sometimes. If we tried to bring water from somewhere else the Taliban would beat us. We sold some things from the house for food. The women would go to the bazaar because the Taliban would beat the men if they saw them. Men could not go because they would be beaten. So the ladies put on burqas and went to the bazaar and we would hide what we bought under the burqas. ~ a 40 year-old from Totomdara Sofla*

*During the war, I planted vegetables in the compound because my husband was not planting in the fields. I was responsible for this and my husband would check to make sure that I did it well. ~ a 40 year-old widow from western Sadaqat*

In eastern Sadaqat, where women traditionally did not work or travel outside of their homes, these roles were maintained during the conflict. It appears that the strict gender roles defined in this community are impervious to external forces.

*We stayed here during the war. The work didn't change at all, the men still planted. ~ a 30 year-old from eastern Sadaqat*

*We went to Panjshir and to Kabul during the war. We had wheat in the house that we ate during the war. Also, we sold milk for money. There was more work for me during that time. But now I have more responsibility than during the war because we are farming and there's more sorting and cleaning vegetables. Now we are free so there's more work. ~ a 25 year- old from eastern Sadaqat*

In general, roles became more flexible during the periods of conflict and instability. Women traveled to markets, purchased items for the households, sold produce at the market. However, as stability increased, the traditional roles for men and women were again adopted. A household's ability to cope with short-term stressors or adapt to long-term shocks is key to reducing vulnerability. In Afghanistan, culture and strict gender roles are an important determinant for how and if a household can cope or adapt.

In areas where roles were more flexible, as soon as the conflict subsided, the traditional roles prevailed. The traditional gender roles and household dynamics are susceptible to short term changes due to necessity, but in the long term appear to be quite rigid and unchanging. Perhaps these rigid gender roles pose one of the greatest challenges to the long-term improvement of household livelihoods in Afghanistan.

### *Change in Times of Need*

The traditional roles are also flexible during times of necessity, such as during episodes of poverty or when men are unable to work or are away from the farm. Several women indicated that they have taken on all responsibilities for agricultural activities when their husbands have been away working in the city and there was no one else to farm. Also, when households experience financial crisis, they often relax the traditional roles out of necessity.

In peri-urban western Sadaqat changing roles seem to be more acceptable as some women are being encouraged by their families to find work outside of the home. One educated, literate participant explained that she is now working because she wants

to and described her sense of empowerment by discovering how much she is capable of accomplishing. She explained how she came to work outside of the home and farm:

*We were rich early in our married years. We bought salt and stored it at the house and were going to sell it when the prices went higher. But the prices dropped and we had to sell our house and gold and valuables. At the same time my daughter wanted to marry but we had no money for the wedding. My husband allowed me to go to work and I paid for the entire wedding. Then my husband realized how much better our lives were when I was also earning income and he allowed me to keep working. We were able to pay off all of our debts. – a married woman from western Sadaqat*

The permanent change in roles seems more likely in households living in peri-urban areas and in those experiencing poverty and crisis. Families which embrace the changing roles are less vulnerable and experience more stable livelihoods. Several factors may contribute to this phenomenon including the fact that families in the peri-urban setting are more anonymous and less bound by a universal culture than those in rural villages. Many are not originally from the area and do not have extended families living nearby who weigh in on what is or is not appropriate behaviour.

Furthermore, the proximity of western Sadaqat to Charikar provides more employment opportunities, including the vegetable dehydration factory, for these women than those in the rural villages. A group of women interviewed in western

Sadaqat explained their situation by saying, “We are independent because the people of the city are not foolish and are more educated, not like the people in the villages.”

In general, it seems that rural families use short-term gender role changes as a coping strategy during times of stress. There is some evidence that families in urban or peri-urban Charikar have adapted to economic crisis by changing the roles for women to allow them to work outside of the home.

### ***5.3 Women’s Participation Does Not Reflect Their Level of Control***

Although most women are very active and important contributors to household and agricultural pursuits, they often do not have comparable decision-making power or control regarding agriculture or general household issues. Furthermore, this power varies greatly based on the woman’s age, marital status and rank within the household.

<b>Findings</b>	<b>Human Capital</b>	<b>Social Capital</b>
Women’s participation in agricultural activities does not reflect their level of control	Although women provide important human capital to household livelihoods, they do not possess comparable decision making power over agricultural or household matters. This reflects the low value which is placed on women’s human capital.	Women often cannot access traditional social networks related to agriculture in spite of their participation.

Questions regarding decision making revolved around two areas: agricultural decision making and decision making and money. Most women agreed that the entire family discusses decisions about agriculture and livelihoods, although the male head of the household generally makes final decisions. Usually, the male head of household

controls the funds for the family and does all or most of the shopping. Some women indicated that they occasionally travel to the market to purchase items such as children's clothes. In addition to the interviews, my experience with the sun-dried tomato project highlighted the variable levels of control which women have over agricultural activities and their own labour.

As with agricultural activities, the level of decision making power a woman has varies greatly based on her position and status within the household. Young women indicated having the least amount of power, older women have more, while widows often act as the head of the household and make all of the decisions.

An interesting exchange occurred during an interview with two young, married women in eastern Sadaqat when I asked if they were interested in doing any type of work to earn income. One young lady said she would be very interested in finding work and the other responded, "Our mother-in-laws would never give us permission to go outside." The first lady replied, "Yes, but we can ask for permission to do work from inside the house." The conversation illustrated to me how greatly their lives are controlled by others.

General comments regarding decision making in the household include the following:

*My husband discusses with our sons about what we should plant each year, and I am also in the house so I give them ideas. – a 40 year-old from Totomdara Sofla*

*Each year we look at what will sell in the market and we all discuss what we should plant. This year we will plant tomatoes and onions. – a 23 year-old, 50 year-old, and 25 year-old from Totomdara Sofla*

*My husband and I make decisions about farming together based on the value of things in the market each year. – a 35 year- old from Sadullah*

The young and married women of eastern Sadaqat seem to be more limited in their ability to participate in decision making and other economic activities. Women in Sadaqat did not seem to have as active a role in agricultural activities and decision making as their counterparts in other villages, but rather were relegated to the role of

### **Figure 3: Development Works' Sun-Dried Tomato Project**

The results of the first year of the sun-dried tomato project reveal insights about women and decision making. The project experienced limited success for several reasons. Firstly, there was a tomato blight which greatly affected the success of the tomato crop that year, leading some families to take advantage of the high fresh market prices rather than drying the tomatoes for the previously agreed rate with DWC. Also, in some cases, women had agreed to participate in the programme without consulting their husbands, who later decided to default on their wives' agreements and sell the tomatoes on the fresh market. This experience illustrates the common household dynamic in rural Charikar.

helpers. When the men discuss agriculture related matters, older women would sometimes contribute but the men always make the final decision. A young, newly married woman indicated that she was not allowed to say anything during these conversations.

Working on the sun-dried tomato project gave me some interesting insight into how variable women's decision making power can be. For the project, we traveled to nearby villages to speak with women about participating in sun drying tomatoes for export. Sometimes we set up large meetings with women in the community, but often we would just walk through villages and stop from house to house to speak with the families. We soon found that the latter approach was preferable as we were then able to speak to both the men and women about the project at the same time. The meetings with women were often not productive because the women did not feel that they could decide on their own if they would participate in the project, even though it was their own time and labour that would be required. Conversations with families in their homes often ended with the male head of household unilaterally deciding whether or not the women would participate, without consulting them, even though he would not be contributing any labour to the project.

There were exceptions however, and some women had the power to make agricultural decisions which directly affected them. One example occurred in Totomdara Sofla where we had a meeting with a large group of women, many of whom agreed to sun-dry tomatoes. We returned home with one of the ladies to see her tomatoes and spoke to her husband about his wife's participation in the project. He said, "She is smart, she can make her own decisions, if she wants to sun-dry then she

will. She is just like any other person who can make decisions.” This response was the exception rather than the rule however.

As with agricultural decision-making, decisions regarding how household resources should be spent are generally made by male heads of household, with some input from women.

*My husband does the shopping. Sometimes if he doesn't know what to buy I will go with him also to pick it out. – a 40 year-old from Totomdara Sofla*

*We make butter and crut and the men sell it in the market. Sometimes we sell it to the neighbors. We use the money to buy things for the house like sugar, but mostly we give the money to the men to buy things. Sometimes we will go to the market ourselves. – a 23 year-old, 50 year-old and 25-year old from Totomdara Sofla*

Several participants indicated that they earn income separate from the household income from their agricultural activities, although this was not widespread. The most common income earner for women was the sale of dairy products either to neighbors or in the local market. Dairy products are one of the few goods which are considered to belong entirely to the women who are therefore permitted to do with them as they will, as long as the household needs are met. Most often a male relative

or child will take the products to the market for sale, but the women often directly receive the profits and have the power to make decisions about how money will be spent. Women also may sell or trade dairy products directly to their neighbors.

In general, women have very limited access to financial capital or control over how to use their own human capital. Afghan culture makes women completely dependent on husbands, fathers or other male relatives and can render them and their children vulnerable. A woman's limited ability to make decisions about how to use her labour or how to spend profits jeopardizes household livelihoods.

#### ***5.4 Conclusion***

It is clear from this research that the human capital which women provide is an essential contributor to sustainable household livelihoods in rural Afghanistan. However, this contribution is often limited by the cultural traditions which prescribe the roles of women in the household, in agriculture and in society. The traditional gender roles which prohibit women from working outside of the home are still described as the ideal, although in reality most rural families can not adhere to these roles as they require all available human capital to achieve adequate livelihoods. The only exception was eastern Sadaqat, where women really did not work in the fields in order to uphold family honour.

The roles that women play in household livelihoods are dynamic and change throughout their lives depending on their ages, marital status, and the household structure. Women's roles may also change as a strategy to cope with external shocks such as conflict and drought, although these changes do not appear to be long-term. Widowhood is one of the greatest changes which can occur in an Afghan woman's life,

leading to entire responsibility for the household, greater autonomy and sometimes increased vulnerability. Social capital can be positive or negative for Afghan widows, leading often to a social safety net in times of need, but sometimes translating into exclusion from important social networks. Although the human capital which women provide is essential to household livelihoods, they usually do not experience comparable control over assets including labour or profits.

## **6 Summary and Conclusion**

My first meetings with men and women in Charikar led me to believe that women's participation in agricultural activities was quite limited, as community members de-emphasized the roles that women played in household livelihoods. After building closer ties to the community, observing farmers during daily travels through villages and farms, meeting with families and asking numerous questions, it is clear that women's participation in agriculture provides essential human capital to the pursuit of household livelihoods. This experience illustrates one of the most significant findings of this research: the cultural values which Afghans often express (especially to strangers or "outsiders") do not always equal the way that households function in reality. It is also evident that, in Afghanistan, place matters. Eastern Sadaqat was the only village in the research project where women do not work in the fields as traditional values dictate.

The participation of women is dynamic and evolves with changing circumstances such as age, marriage, location, migration and conflict. While most families embrace flexible gender roles as a coping strategy in situations of conflict or periods of economic stress, these changes generally are not adaptive and long-term in nature. The human capital which women provide to the household evolves over their lifetime and according to external factors. Again eastern Sadaqat is an exception, as women there insisted that their roles did not change during the conflict and that the highest priority of these households is to uphold family honour by adhering to traditional cultural values.

Compared to married counterparts, widows and female-headed households experience dramatic changes in their roles and face complex and interconnected vulnerabilities. Land tenure and access to other assets is a significant challenge for many widows, who often cannot find support through the practically non-existent legal system. Compared to men, rural widows who own land deal with limited human capital and sometimes inadequate access to resources. Social capital in the form of community and extended family assistance can be essential to the well-being of these households. Urban widows, most of whom are landless and impoverished, struggle to find socially acceptable employment and to earn adequate wages. Migration to urban areas may translate into a lack of social capital for these female-headed households, but may also afford them a greater array of employment options as they are less concerned with upholding family honour.

Although women are active participants in household agricultural pursuits, their level of control and decision-making power does not equal their contribution. Even when women earn income through work for which they are wholly responsible, they often do not control earnings or make decisions about the activity. Culturally, women's access to assets is restricted, even when required for activities for which they are responsible and which contribute to the household livelihood.

### ***6.1 Research Contributions and Areas for Future Research***

After years of conflict and political instability, the people of rural Charikar are attempting to recover economic security and move on with their lives. Agriculture plays a dominant part in recovery and the Afghan government and international donors are spending millions of dollars to support agricultural renewal. However, the years of

turmoil have limited the ability of researchers to understand how exactly Afghan households undertake agricultural activities, and specifically, the role that women play. Furthermore, conflict, migration, drought and increased poverty have likely affected the livelihood strategies of Afghan families in ways that are just beginning to be understood.

This research provides insight into how households pursue livelihoods through agriculture in one area of Afghanistan. These findings are specific to Charikar and, as illustrated, there can be significant variation from village to village and across the country. Findings will be distributed to Afghan government and international agencies conducting relevant programming. Specifically, the research can help aid programmes better target appropriate household members and assist in better incorporating women into development programming.

The difficult operational environment coupled with an ultra-conservative viewpoint on women has effectively cut women off from access to effective agricultural development projects. This research demonstrates, however, that women play a critical role in agriculture, and to ignore them is to seriously debilitate overall economic recovery. It also suggests entry points for engaging women in agriculture, including activities for which they are responsible such as livestock care and dairy processing, and including women in household agriculture pursuits.

International agencies in particular are eager to assist Afghan women through improved livelihoods, empowerment and education. While this is commendable, the roles of women and the cultural context are not always well understood or accepted by international groups, which limits the effectiveness of rural aid programmes. This

research sheds some light on possible ways to provide assistance to women and their families that would be culturally appropriate and effective. It should be evident that it is not always possible or desirable to separate women from the household when considering the improvement of livelihood outcomes or empowerment.

Findings were shared with research collaborators, who now have a better understanding of their very important contribution to family livelihoods. Many women commented that they did not realize how much they actually did contribute to agriculture until they were asked to list their activities. Perhaps this realization will be one small step toward equalizing women's participation with their control and power over household livelihoods. Indeed a recurrent theme I found when interviewing Afghan women was the realization of their critical role in family livelihood.

#### *6.1.1 The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF)*

The SLF proved to be an effective starting point for examining the issue of gender roles in agriculture in Afghanistan. The bottom-up approach allowed the research to focus on the individual and household perspectives, eliciting the personal stories of the collaborators, while situating it in the broader historical, macro-level context. As individual and personal as these stories are, they can not be separated from the household dynamic which is so important in every aspect of Afghan life. The SLF was an effective means for exploring the variety of ways that households function together to achieve adequate livelihood outcomes.

The SLF allows one to consider a multitude of factors which potentially impact livelihood outcomes and the ways that these factors interact and affect one another. The cross-sectoral approach considers politics, culture, a variety of vulnerabilities, and

economics from the micro to the macro levels. Furthermore, one can choose which factors are most relevant and at which point to initiate research, providing flexibility and a tailor-made approach to unique circumstances. Focusing on the areas of human capital, social capital, conflict, culture and gender roles – all issues addressed (explicitly or implicitly) in the SLF – the research attempted to holistically consider the many factors which affect household livelihood strategies in Charikar.

The prolonged conflict and post-conflict status of Afghanistan provided some challenges for the SLF. Perhaps most significantly, as Afghanistan experiences continuing political instability and sporadic conflict, immediate survival takes precedence over the sustainability of livelihoods for most Afghan households. The criticism by many that the SLF does not adequately consider the importance of the vulnerability context in situations of prolonged conflict is a valid one. In the Afghan situation, the vulnerability context should be conceptualized as central to the SLF, as it impacts every aspect of livelihoods, from assets to culture to strategies and outcomes. The future of Afghanistan is yet unknown and households are slowly and tentatively attempting to transition from survival to sustainability.

### *6.1.2 Areas for Further Research*

This research revealed several areas which warrant further research. The unique vulnerabilities of widows, including issues such as access to assets, social capital, human capital, deserve further exploration. Prolonged conflict has generated an abundance of female-headed households and placed extreme stress on the social systems which traditionally assisted these families. This situation has multiplied the vulnerabilities for female-headed households and appears to be eliciting changes in the

traditional social values for these women. Related to sustainable livelihoods and widows is the issue of land tenure and the legal and social context.

The vegetable dehydration factory and the sun-dried tomato project had just begun when this research took place. It would be interesting to examine the social and economic impacts that international agribusiness is having in the Charikar area. Specifically, an examination of how factory employment or participation in the sun-dried tomato project has affected the livelihoods of women and their families would have merit.

## **6.2 Conclusion**

This thesis has significant implications for designing aid programmes to assist Afghan households to achieve sustainable livelihoods. It illustrates both the important contribution which women make to agriculture and the necessity of considering livelihoods at the household level in the Afghan context. The research also reveals the heterogeneous nature of women's participation in agriculture. While changing roles are a widely utilized coping strategy, long-term change appears to be a slow development. The research process proved to be a revelatory experience for the women involved, who have gained a deeper understanding for their contribution to their families' livelihoods.

## References

- Ackerly, Brooke. "Testing the Tools of Development: Credit Programmes, Loan Involvement, and Women's Empowerment," *IDS Bulletin* Vol. 26, No. 3, 1995.
- Barakat, Sultan and Gareth Wardell. "Exploited by Whom? An Alternative Perspective on Humanitarian Assistance to Afghan Women," *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 5: 909-930, 2002.
- Bhatia, Michael et al. "Profits and Poverty: Aid, Livelihoods and Conflict in Afghanistan," *Power, Livelihoods and Conflict: Case Studies in Political Economy Analysis for Humanitarian Action*, Ed. Sarah Collinson, HPG Report 13, ODI, London, February 2003.
- Bohle, Hans-Georg. "Vulnerability and Criticality," Newsletter of the International Human Dimensions Programme on Global Environmental Change," No. 2, 2001.
- Chambers, Robert and Gordon Conway. "Sustainable Rural Livelihoods: Practical Concepts for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," *IDS Discussion Paper* 296, Brighton, 1992.
- Christoplos, Ian. "Out of Step? Agricultural Policy and Afghan Livelihoods," *Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit*, May 2004.
- Davies, S. "How Will You Cope Without Me, Honey? A Review of the Literature on Gender and Coping Strategies," *IDS*, Brighton, 1996.
- De Haan, Leo and Annelies Zoomers. "Exploring the Frontier of Livelihoods Research," *Development and Change* 36 (1): 27-47, 2005.
- Department for International Development. "Sustainable Livelihoods Guidance Sheets," April 1999.
- Dupree, Nancy Hatch. "Cultural Heritage and National Identity in Afghanistan," *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 5: 977-989, 2002.

- Dupree, Nancy Hatch. "The Family during Crisis in Afghanistan," Journal of Comparative Family Studies, Vol. 35, No. 2: 311-331, 2004.
- Ewans, Martin. *Afghanistan*, RoutledgeCurzon, London, 2002.
- "Geography." Embassy of Afghanistan in Canada. 10 March 2007.  
<<http://www.afghanemb-canada.net/en/geography/>>.
- Grace, Jo and Adam Pain. "Rethinking Rural Livelihoods in Afghanistan," Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, June 2004.
- Grace, Jo. "Gender Roles in Agriculture: Case Studies of Five Villages in Northern Afghanistan," Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, March 2004.
- Kabeer, Naila. *Reversed Realities: Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought*. Verso, London 1994.
- Kasperson, Roger. "Vulnerability and Global Environmental Change," International Human Dimensions Program Update Issue 2: 2001.
- Little, Jo and Ruth Panelli. "Gender Research in Rural Geography," Gender, Place and Culture, Vol. 10, No. 3: 281-289, 2003.
- Longley, Catherine, Ian Christoplos and Tom Slaymaker. "Agricultural Rehabilitation: Mapping the Linkages between Humanitarian Relief, Social Protection and Development," HPG Report 22, ODI, London, April 2006.
- Masika, Rachel and Susan Joekes. "Employment and Sustainable Livelihoods: A Gender Perspective," BRIDGE (development – gender) Report No. 37, Institute of Development Studies, December 1996.
- Moghadam, Valentine M. "Building Human Resources and Women's Capabilities in Afghanistan: A Retrospect and Prospects," World Development, Vol. 22, No. 6: 859-875, 1994.

- Moghadam, Valentine M. "Patriarchy, the Taleban, and Politics of Public Space in Afghanistan," Women's Studies International Forum, Vol. 25, No. 1: 19-31, 2002.
- Multi-Donor Mission. Afghanistan: Natural Resources and Agriculture Sector. Comprehensive Needs Assessment. Draft Report. Kabul: June 2002.
- Norchi, Charles H. "Blowback from Afghanistan: The Historical Roots," CIAO Working Paper, Columbia University Press, February 1996.
- Oberhauser, Ann M., Jennifer L. Mandel and Holly M. Hapke. "Gendered Livelihoods in Diverse Global Contexts: An Introduction," Gender, Place and Culture, Vol 11, No. 2: 205-208, 2004.
- Pain, Adam and Sue Lautze. "Addressing Livelihoods in Afghanistan," Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, Kabul, September 2002.
- Pain, Adam. "Understanding and Monitoring Livelihoods under Conditions of Chronic Conflict: Lessons from Afghanistan," Overseas Development Institute, London, December 2002.
- "Profiles: Agriculture." FAO Representation in Afghanistan. 15 April 2007.  
<[http://www.fao.org/world/afghanistan/prof\\_ag\\_en.htm](http://www.fao.org/world/afghanistan/prof_ag_en.htm)>
- Rubin, Barnett. "The Political Economy of War and Peace in Afghanistan," World Development, Vol. 28, No. 10: 1789-1803, 2000.
- Schafer, Jessica. "Supporting Livelihoods in Situations of Chronic Conflict and Political Instability: Overview of Conceptual Issues," Overseas Development Institute, London, December 2002.
- "The Status of Women in Afghanistan." Human Rights Watch. October 2004.  
<<http://hrw.org/campaigns/afghanistan/facts.htm>>
- UNDP. Afghanistan National Human Development Report: Security with a Human Face, Challenges and Responsibilities, 2004.

United Nations Economic and Social Council. "Discrimination against Women and Girls in Afghanistan: Report of the Secretary-General," January 2002.

United Nations High Commission for Refugees, "Assessment of Shomali Plain," 2002.

Vogelsang, Willem. *The Afghans*, Blackwell Publishers, Ltd, Oxford, 2002.

Watts, Michael and Hans Bohle. "The Space of Vulnerability: The Causal Structure of Hunger and Famine," Progress in Human Geography 17: 43-67, 1993.

Young, Helen et al. *Nutrition and Livelihoods in Situations of Conflict and Other Crises*. Medford, Massachusetts: Feinstein International Famine Center, Tufts University, 2002.

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A: Initial Questionnaire**

#### ***Introduction and Oral Consent***

We are doing research on the ways that women in your village participate in agriculture. The research is being conducted by Erica Gilmour as part of a university programme she is completing in Canada. Although you may know us from our work with DWC, this research is completely separate from the factory. However, the information you give us may also be shared with DWC, other NGOs, UN agencies and Afghan government ministries. We will not give out your name or any other information that could identify you. You will not receive any direct assistance through participation in this research, but we hope that the information that you provide will help organizations develop better assistance programmes in your village and the Charikar area.

The interview will take from 30 to 60 minutes. You may stop the interview at any time, or choose not to answer any of the questions. We plan to come back to visit you in several weeks to share our findings and ask follow-up questions.

Can we interview you? Is now a good time or should we come back later?

#### ***Personal Questions***

- 1) What is your name?
- 2) How old are you?
- 3) What is your marital status?
- 4) How many people are in your household and what is their relation to you?

- 5) Does your family own land and if so, how much?
- 6) How would you describe the economic well-being of your household relative to other households in your village? (e.g. very poor, poor, comfortable, wealthy.)

### ***Agriculture***

- 1) What crops are commonly planted in your community?
- 2) In which activities do you participate in relation to:
  - a) Planting
  - b) Weeding
  - c) Harvesting
  - d) Processing
  - e) Selling produce
  - f) Livestock rearing
- 3) Are there certain vegetables or fruits for which women are more responsible than other members of the household?
- 4) Are there certain activities for which women and men are generally responsible?
- 5) Describe circumstances in which women and men might take on each others' responsibilities either temporarily or permanently (e.g. when men are away fighting or working, women take on greater responsibility on the farm.)
- 6) What responsibilities do women have as far as taking care of livestock and processing dairy and meat products?

### ***Livelihoods and Household Economics***

- 1) What constitutes a household in your community?
- 2) Are earnings shared with the entire household or can people spend it individually?
- 3) If an extended family lives together, do they share their incomes?
- 4) If women earn money on their own, do they decide how to spend it? Do they give it to their husbands/fathers?

***Decision-making***

- 1) Who makes decisions about agriculture? (Such as what crops to plant, where to plant, when, how much to spend on seeds, fertilizer, what tools or equipment to buy).
- 2) How do they decide?
- 3) In activities for which women are mainly responsible, do they decide the details?

## **Appendix B: Revised Questionnaire**

*(Revised with input from research assistants, Zabeda and Deeba).*

### ***Introduction and Oral Consent***

We are doing research on the ways that women in your village participate in agriculture. The research is being conducted by Erica Gilmour as part of a university programme she is completing in Canada. Although you may know us from our work with DWC, this research is completely separate from the factory. However, the information you give us may also be shared with DWC, other NGOs, UN agencies and Afghan government ministries. We will not give out your name or any other information that could identify you. You will not receive any direct assistance through participation in this research, but we hope that the information that you provide will help organizations develop better assistance programmes in your village and the Charikar area.

The interview will take from 30 to 60 minutes. You may stop the interview at any time, or choose not to answer any of the questions. We plan to come back to visit you in several weeks to share our findings and ask follow-up questions.

Can we interview you? Is now a good time or should we come back later?

### ***Personal Questions***

- 1) What is your name?
- 2) How old are you?
- 3) What is your marital status?
- 4) How many people are in your household and what is their relation to you?
- 5) Does your family own land and if so, how much?

- 6) What level of education do you have? Can you read and write?
- 7) At what age were you married? How did marriage affect your work / life / role in your new household?

### ***Work***

- 1) Describe an average day in your life (in the summer, winter)
- 2) What housework are you responsible for?
- 3) Who else in the household undertakes housework?
- 4) Do you work outside of the home? Why or why not?
- 5) What is the relationship between housework and working outside of the home (including in the fields).

### ***Agriculture***

- 1) What crops does your family plant?
- 2) In which activities do you participate in relation to:
  - a) Planting
  - b) Weeding
  - c) Harvesting
  - d) Processing
  - e) Selling produce
  - f) Livestock rearing
- 3) Are there certain vegetables or fruits for which women are more responsible than other members of the household?
- 4) Are there certain activities for which women and men are generally responsible?
- 5) Describe circumstances in which women and men might take on each others' responsibilities either temporarily or permanently (e.g. when men are away fighting or working, women take on greater responsibility on the farm.)

- 6) What responsibilities do women have as far as taking care of livestock and processing dairy and meat products?
- 7) Do you have access to resources necessary for ag production? Such as water, land, fertilizer, seeds? (This is a question more for female-headed households)

#### ***Livelihoods and Household Economics***

- 1) Are earnings shared with the entire household or can people spend it individually?
- 2) If an extended family lives together, do they share their incomes?
- 3) If women earn money on their own, do they decide how to spend it? Do they give it to their husbands/fathers? Do you and your husband (other family members) discuss how to spend money that either of you has earned? Who makes the final decision?
- 4) What assets does your family own (vehicles, livestock, etc)? Do you have access to these assets?

#### ***History / External factors***

- 1) How has your role in earning family livelihoods changed over your lifetime?
- 2) How did your role in agriculture and in livelihoods in general change during the war?
- 3) How have your activities changed since the war has finished?
- 4) Does drought affect your role in livelihoods at all (role in ag)?

#### ***Decision-making and Empowerment***

- 1) Who makes decisions about agriculture? (Such as what crops to plant, where to plant, when, how much to spend on seeds, fertilizer, what tools or equipment to buy).

- 2) How do they decide?
- 3) In activities for which women are mainly responsible, do they decide the details?
- 4) How do other people (both other household members and community members) view women who are involved in agriculture? Who work outside of the home?

## **Appendix C: Initial Findings Shared with Participants**

### ***Female Field Work***

- All women work in the fields, except in lower Sadaqat where no women work in the fields
- In Sadaqat, various reasons are given for not working outside:
  - Family honour / do not have permission
  - They can not do the work
  - Because of watching children
- The widows everywhere are willing to work in others' fields "we are widows, we will work"

### ***Decision Making***

- Women are included in discussions about agriculture and the decision-making process
- Older women seem to have more say than younger women
- Men usually do the shopping and make decisions
- Even when women make money from household agricultural activities (such as selling yogurt), they give the money to the men to go shopping
- Generally, the head of the household makes final decisions – in some cases this is a widow / mother

### ***Agricultural House Work***

- Women seem to do ALL of the agricultural work which takes place within the compound / house – including drying vegetables, animal care, vegetable sorting.

- Women take care of animals when they are inside the compound, but not when they are outside

### ***Female Income***

- Generally, women do not seem to earn direct income by their activities. And if they do, they do not usually directly spend the money they have earned.

### ***House Work***

- Even though women help in the fields, their HW responsibilities do not decrease.
- Younger women do more of the HW

### ***Changes Due to Necessity***

- If the situation requires it, some women take on more responsibility for agriculture
- Women do more / different work when their husbands cannot

### ***Changes Due to Marital Status***

- There is more work after marriage and even more work as a widow.
- Several stopped farming when they became widows
- Many start working outside when they become widows

### ***Social Norms***

- In Sadaqat, young women do not work in the fields or ever venture out of the house much
- Older women / widows have more freedom, more decision making power, receive more respect
- The honour of the family is connected to how women behave, including working in the fields

- In eastern Sadaqat, even if women do not have money, they will not work in the fields
- Women in more urban settings seem to have slightly greater freedoms, but this still depends on a great deal on age and marital status. Young, married women are still expected not to venture out too much.
- The desire for a better living seems to be breaking some social barriers. Women and their families are choosing for women to work outside in order to increase livelihoods. This is happening more in the urban areas than in the rural however.

### ***Land***

- Some widows inherit land and keep farming, often with the help of male relatives
- Landless families, and especially female headed households, experience greater poverty
- Women who live in urban areas seem to have greater freedom of movement
- Some widows do not inherit their husband's land as is the law.

### ***Migration ~ Factory and western Sadaqat***

- Some women had migrated to Iran, Pakistan, other areas of Afghanistan, much more than in other interview groups

### ***Honour ~ eastern Sadaqat***

- If there is a choice between keeping the family honour and eating – honour wins out

## Appendix D: Follow-up Questions

- To what extent does whether or not a woman works in the fields depend on age / marriage / children / wealth?
- How much is whether or not a woman works in the field tied to wealth especially? (Some women who said they could not work in the fields seemed quite poor, others wealthy.)
- Are there ever arguments when the household is making decisions about agriculture, and if so, who has the final say / how are they resolved?
- Before the men go shopping, do they discuss with their wives what to buy? How much say does the woman have in what they will buy?
- Do the women have more say in what will be purchased when the money was made through their efforts?
- Some women went shopping / moved around outside more during the Taliban because of threats to their men. Did they have more decision making power then? Has that experience had any long term affects?
- Why don't women more often try to sell their products, such as milk?
- How does earning income affect a woman's status within the household? Do they have more decision-making power, or higher status?
- Some women said that they take on more responsibility and/or do different activities in times of necessity (such as when their husbands are away working). Do

they sometimes continue even after their husbands return? Does this have any long-term affect on a woman's role in agriculture or household in general?

- Many women don't do field work for the first 1 to 3 years after marriage. Why? How common is this? Does it vary according to wealth and family make up?
- Widows seem to have more responsibilities and decision making power. Does this depend more on age or marital status? Can an older, married woman also take on more responsibilities?

## **Appendix E: Summary of Major Findings**

### ***Female Field Work***

- In general, women participate in agricultural field work, except in lower Sadaqat where no women work in the fields
- In Sadaqat, various reasons are given for not working outside:
  - Family honour / do not have permission
  - They can not do the work
  - Because of watching children
- The work which women tend to do includes planting, weeding, watering, harvesting, collecting seeds
- Women often assist male relatives in the fields
- Women are often wholly responsible for weeding
- In all of the research villages, newly married women often do not do any work outside of the home for the first one to three years of marriage. This seems to be a cultural tradition. If the newly married woman does have to work it reflects badly on the family and they lose honour. Some poor families are not able to adhere to this tradition, but this was described by the ladies as “very bad.”
- Older women and the sick do not work outside of the home for health reasons. They then take on as much of the house work as possible.
- In upper Sadaqat, the widows are willing to work in others’ fields “we are widows, we will work” – other interviewees have said that this is the most dishonourable thing – to work in others fields

### ***Agricultural Decision Making***

- Women are included in discussions about agriculture and the decision-making process
- Older women, especially the wife or mother of the male head of the household have the most clout
- In general, younger women are included in conversations but rarely give opinions. If their opinions are given, they are not given much weight.
- Generally, the head of the household makes final decisions – in some cases this is a widow / mother
- When there are disagreements amongst family members, the head of household (usually a male) makes the final decision

### ***Money and Decision Making***

- Men usually do the shopping and make decisions about how money will be spent.
- Some women make money through handiwork or making food products such as yogurt, milk or eggs. In these cases, women often keep the money they've earned and spend it on clothes for themselves or their children, or on household items. This is not true in eastern Sadaqat where women do not generally go shopping.

### ***Agricultural House Work***

- Women seem to do all of the agricultural work which takes place within the compound / house – including drying vegetables, animal care, vegetable sorting.
- Women take care of animals when they're inside the compound, but not when they're outside

### ***Female Income***

- Most women in the villages do not seem to earn direct income by their activities. Widows in the villages and in the peri-urban area of western Sadaqat are more likely to earn incomes and be responsible for how their earnings are spent.
- In some families, women who earn extra income gain greater respect and decision-making power within the family.

### ***House Work***

- Even though women are expected to help in the fields, their HW responsibilities do not decrease.
- House Work is divided between the women in the household; therefore the amount of housework one woman is expected to do varies greatly upon the number of women in the house, and their status and relationship.
- The newly married and the elderly seem to be the most responsible for house work.
- Men never do house work (cooking, cleaning, agricultural work within the house)

### ***Changes Due to Necessity***

- If the situation requires it, some women take on more responsibility for agriculture.
- Women do more / different work when their husbands cannot
- During the Taliban especially, many women did more work in the fields and had more freedom of movement, did more shopping, because the men were afraid to travel outside of the house. The Taliban would sometimes beat and arrest men they found outside. However, there doesn't seem to be any long term changes because of this – women stopped going shopping when they weren't required to any more. And the gender roles for agricultural production have reverted to the time before the Taliban.

- In eastern Sadaqat, even during the Taliban period, women did not venture outside or take on any more outside agricultural work. The cultural norms there seem inflexible to changing circumstances.
- In western Sadaqat, the women say that they now have more freedom to work outside of the home. It is now up to them if they want to or not.

### ***Changes Due to Marital Status***

- The most significant change surrounding marital status is that from a married woman to a widow. Widows generally have much greater freedom of movement, of decision making, and with these, greater responsibilities for agricultural and economic activities. Widows often become the head of the household and take on the role that is commonly filled by men. While many widows seem to relish this new-found freedom and power, they also often express wistfulness for the time when their husbands took care of everything for them.
- Marriage seems to increase the amount of both house and agricultural work that is required for women. This can in some situations be explained by the fact that an unmarried girl is coming from a larger household where there are more people to undertake household and agricultural tasks. When a young woman marries, she often is not allowed to work in the fields for the first 1 to 3 years of her marriage; however she may have the bulk of the household work to complete by herself. Additionally, as a newcomer to the household she has no power over her time or efforts, with her mother in law or other older female family members dictating her daily chores.

- Especially in western Sadaqat, many women begin to work outside of the home and farm when they become widows. Most of these women are landless and have a greater proximity to urban Charikar. There also seem to be weaker community ties and therefore less fear that their activities will be deemed socially unacceptable.
- In the villages interviewed, widows almost always stayed on their husband's land and continued to farm, often with the assistance of male children or other family members. In almost every case, the widow had the ultimate decision making power for all farm activities.

### *Social Norms*

- In eastern Sadaqat, women do not work in the fields or ever venture out of the house very much. They explain that this is due to family honour and the social norms of the community. Even though some families which I visited seemed quite poor, they still hired local labourers to help in the fields rather than allowing their women to work outside of the home. Women in this community often were not even aware of how much land their husbands' owned or where it was located.
- In all areas researched, older women, and especially widows, have more freedom, more decision making power, and receive more respect.
- Family honour is a very important aspect of Afghan culture, which is based on a complex system of rules and regulations for the way family members behave. The actions and reputations of women are key to maintaining family honour and this greatly prescribes the actions which are permissible for women.

- Women in more urban settings seem to have slightly greater freedoms, but this still depends a great deal on age and marital status. Young, married women are still expected not to venture out too much.
- The desire for a better living seems to be breaking some social barriers, especially in western Sadaqat which is closer to Charikar city. Women and their families are choosing for women to work outside in order to increase livelihoods. This is happening more in the urban areas, where there are greater opportunities for outside work for women.
- There is a great difference between the norms for urban and rural women. Living in a more urban setting seems to bring a mixed bag for women. They tend to have more freedom of movement / decision making and often work outside of the home. However, this same anonymity in the urban areas seems to bring greater insecurity in times of need. There is less of a social safety net than in the villages where everyone knows one another, families live near or with each other and people help each other out.

### *Land*

- Land is owned by men generally, although legally, widows inherit at least a quarter of their husband's land after his death. If she has sons, she holds the land in trust for her sons until they come of age. If she is childless, she inherits usually a quarter of the land and the rest goes back to his family.
- In the villages interviewed, almost all women did inherit their husband's land and continued to farm, often with the assistance of male relatives.

- In the more urban areas (western Sadaqat and the factory), several women had moved to these areas after becoming widows and losing their husband's land. These women were not from any of the research villages. While some had decided to sell the land, feeling unable to manage farming on their own, several others claim that their husband's families took the land from them and left them with no choice but to move and look for work. These women were often struggling to make ends meet.